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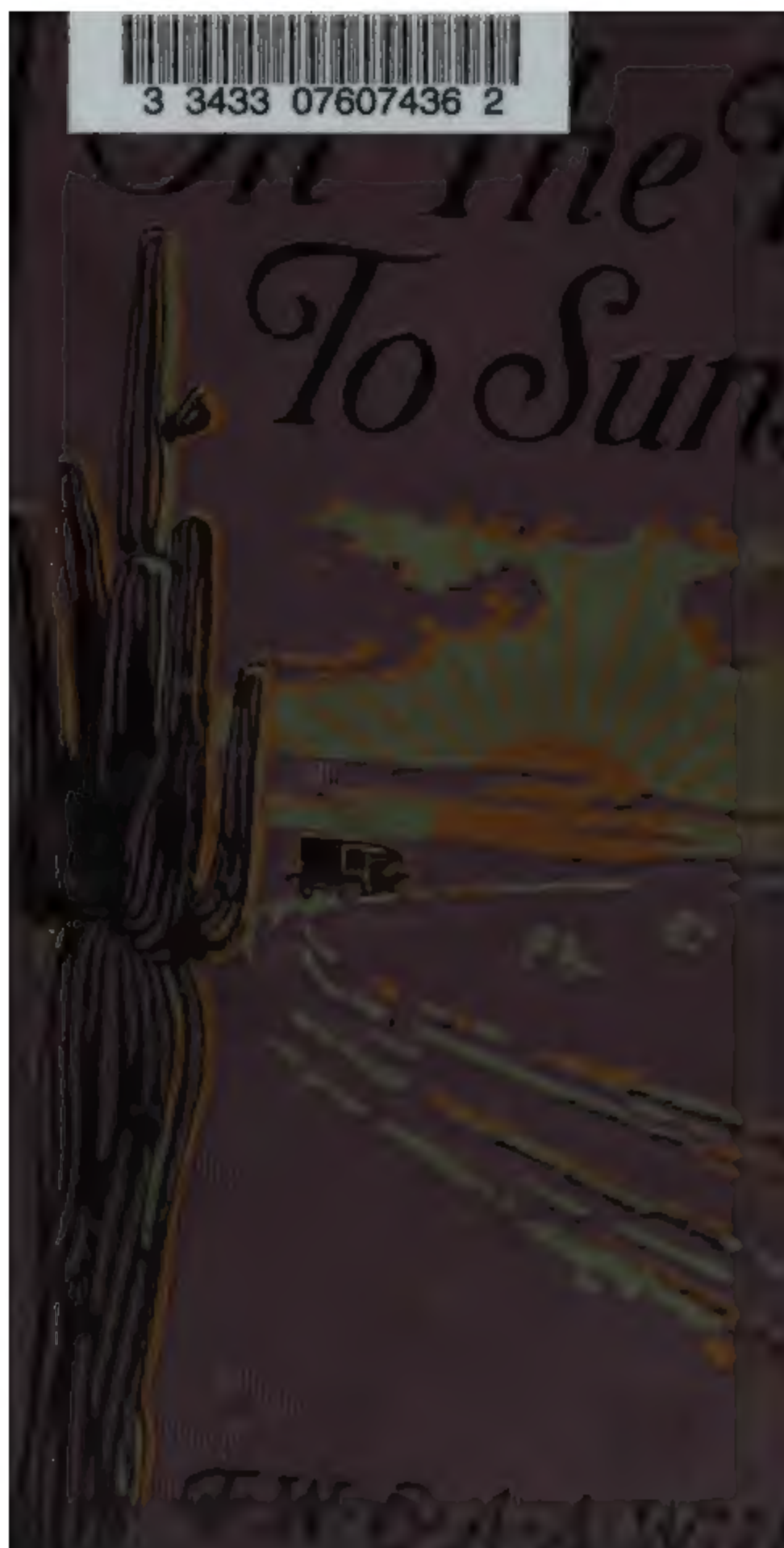
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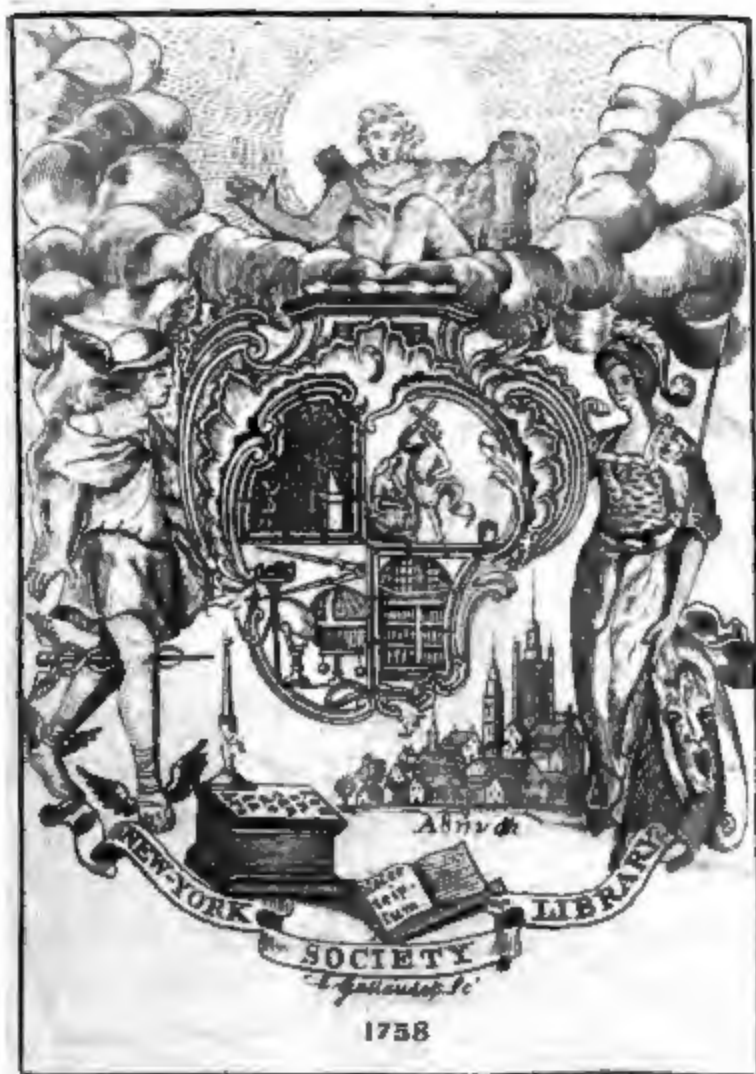
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"A deep passage was cut through a veritable mountain of sand."

ON THE TRAIL TO SUNSET

BY

THOMAS W. AND AGNES A. WILBY

Illustrated from Photographs

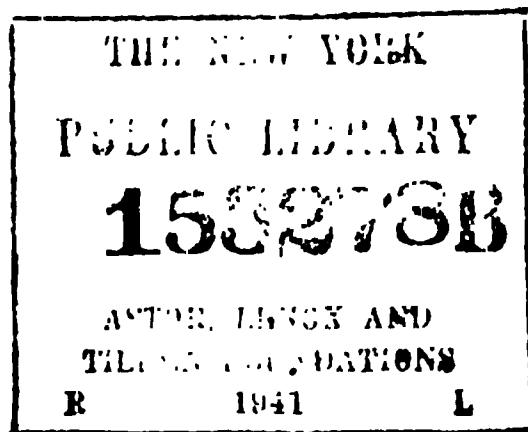


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CHAPTER I

WINTHROP HAMMOND walked.

The leisurely habit had of late become a part of him. It amused him. It synchronized with his feelings. It pleased him to feel that it was the Revolt of Man against the busy tide of the City which flowed past him along the Avenue—a noisy, ceaseless surge of carriaged and motor-ing humanity, which left the pedestrian stranded like a glacial moraine upon the stony ledge of the sidewalk.

Even in the last few months the Avenue had changed with the completeness of a chameleon. Though he traversed some portion of it almost daily, it seemed to him now, more than ever, that he recognized it only in its generalizations and essentials. The Avenue had been widened, the dwelling-houses altered or deserted, the palatial mansions mutilated and shorn of architectural adornments. There were the banks and stores stealing a march upon his favorite haunts; there were the fashionable trades and gilded professions flaunting their myriad signs with all the effrontery and daring of their upstart kind. Even the emblazoned splendor, the perfect *chic* of outline and finish of the shops, did not excuse to him the cruelty of a vandalism which had de-

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manded so much real sacrifice. Time-honored, cherished associations had been swept away bodily as by fire.

To Winthrop this bold incursion of commercialism into these sacred precincts was comparable only to some death-dealing Juggernaut. He was a good-enough American, he thought, but here was a spirit which for the first time brought his loyalty into warring clash with the untrammelled freedom of his spirit.

Across the Avenue, as he threaded his way to the opposite sidewalk, was a canyon-like street whose dark walls were lit to color and picturesqueness by the fires of the dying sun. Half-way down the street the iridescent glow touched the giant frame of an unfinished "sky-scraper," exaggerating its proportions and transforming its storied outlines into the semblance of a cloud of monster biplanes, while low at the distant end shone the great crimson ball, the seething heart of the sunset.

For a moment Winthrop felt the passionate glow reflected in his own soul. The sunset seemed to beckon him from the turmoil of the City, as if it would lure him down the canyon street.

His steps wavered. He fancied that in the glowing, brilliant clouds, he suddenly discerned the faint, well-known outline of a girlish figure. He brushed his glove hastily across his eyes and strode on down the Avenue.

The crimson glory had given place to a heavy, opaque, indigo shadow in the Western heavens



before he reached that portion of the Avenue where the crowded palaces of "Millionaires' Row" look uninterruptedly across the lordly reaches of the Park. The low wall unfolded itself mystically in the half-light of the dying day. Dim figures could be seen flitting across the wide, undulating spaces, to disappear within the bosky shadows. Tiny black objects, darting hither and thither, gradually resolved themselves into motor cars, making their way with uncompromising directness from one City quarter to another by the tree-lined avenues. A row of giant buildings brought up the distant perspective like a mighty Chinese wall.

Winthrop paused before an elaborately ornamented house—one of those choice bits of domestic French Renaissance which opulent New York has appropriated as peculiarly its own. His uncle's home had always delighted him with its architectural charm—its tourelles here, its overhanging windows there, and its cullings from François Premier sculpturings spread tenderly everywhere over the gray surfaces as vines over the stones which they love.

He could hardly understand why his uncle and aunt had hitherto preferred to join the ranks of those traveled Americans who, for the sake of the delights of European motoring and the novelty of foreign residence, are willing to neglect the more intimate charms of their own homes and the natural, half-wild beauty of American scenery. Perhaps it was because of his own fondness for

the Eastcott house that he had so keenly resented the insolent encroachments of the shops and banks of the lower Avenue.

Winthrop passed through the gates of the handsome iron grille. A butler, with the outward deference of his kind, opened a heavy door. The visitor nodded, like a familiar guest, and entered a wide hall, where, in striking contrast with the modernity of the exterior, marble seats and enormous vases and urns suggested the simplicity and dignity of a Roman atrium. A flight of heavily carpeted stairs led to the apartments above.

As Winthrop placed his hand on the balustrade, the low voice of a woman greeted him with gentle reproach.

“Why, Win, I thought you were coming in time for tea. It’s too bad! There was a charming young lady calling upon me—just home from Paris. I know you would have liked her.”

Mrs. Eastcott stood at the top of the stairs and held out a small jeweled hand in welcome. She was a pretty, plump personage, with a merry face and a wealth of light hair. Her blue eyes reflected a sunny temperament, unruffled by the petty cares or annoyances of the less well-to-do. There was about her an air of refinement which fitted well with her luxurious surroundings. Her face was animated and vivacious, while both manner and dress bore the unmistakable impress of the cultured mondaine of society.

“Sorry, Aunt Nell,” said Winthrop, betraying no particular animation concerning the young

lady visitor. He ignored the hand stretched out to him, and caught his aunt around the waist in an affectionate masculine hug. "But you know I'm American enough to dodge teas and—well, I've invited myself to dinner instead."

"If I believed that and weren't sure that you've been slaving in that grimy newspaper den, there'd be no dinner for you, young man!"

"There certainly was some stuff to be fixed up at short notice for the next edition, and——"

"That dreadful old Editor again, I suppose!" she exclaimed with an emphasis that would have hardly flattered the gentleman in question, had he been present.

"He's as mad as a hatter with me to-day. That 'beat' about uncle, you know—got me into disgrace because we hadn't a line. I came down here as soon as I could get away to find out what it's all about."

Mrs. Eastcott exchanged a look of reproach for one of interrogation.

"It fairly staggered me," continued the young man enigmatically. "All the way up, I've been wondering——"

"Why, Win!——"

"Hallo, there's uncle!" He caught his aunt by the arm and led her with the impetuosity of youth into the adjoining room.

John Eastcott was strumming on the piano in absent-minded fashion. "Hello there, Win!" he said, turning. "Expected you long ago!"

Winthrop laughed good-naturedly. "'Et tu,

Brute? ' Another appointment broken? How could such an unimportant microcosm as I occupy your thoughts on a day like this, Uncle John? "

" Why, what's the matter with the day? " asked the other, with a slight start of surprise.

" Well, you've the biggest headlines in the *Evening Postal*, that's all. The ' old man ' says that if I don't know enough to let Knight get news about my own kith and kin from under my very nose, I've evidently missed my vocation. I haven't recovered from the shock yet! "

Mrs. Eastcott looked from one to the other blankly. Her husband slowly reddened, and frowned at Winthrop.

" What do you mean? " Eastcott asked guiltily, glancing at his wife from the tail of his eye. He made a surreptitious motion toward his lips with his fingers, suggestive of the Dominican sign for silence.

Winthrop regarded them both.

" By George! " he said. " Then it's only a newspaper story after all! That will put me right with the ' old man.' Wait a minute; I'll fetch the ' rag ' and you shall see for yourself what it says."

The deep red flush grew on Eastcott's cheeks. He walked over to the window nervously, and, pulling aside the draperies, stared out upon the lights of the Avenue. Why had not Knight held back the news until the next day? Eastcott could have kicked himself for not having exacted a

promise of secrecy. His impulse was to hurry after his nephew, give him a hint as to the situation, and confiscate the newspaper. He started rapidly toward the door and ran full tilt into the returning guest.

"Here it is," the young man said cheerfully, holding up a sheet on which were emblazoned in immense red and black letters a series of sensational headlines. "What do you think of that for a newspaper yarn?" He smoothed out the sheet so that his uncle and aunt could read the glaring words:

**"WELL-KNOWN GLOBE-TROTTER TO
CONQUER THE WEST!**

**JOHN EASTCOTT TO BLAZE A TRAIL
ACROSS AMERICA BY AUTOMOBILE
AND END THE MONOPOLY OF THE
RAILROAD!"**

Mrs. Eastcott laughed lightly, but her merriment ended abruptly almost before it had escaped her. Her husband had turned away. Her nephew had lowered the paper, looking again from one to the other in amazement. Why did John not speak? Why was Win in sudden consternation? What had happened?

"I—I'm awfully sorry!" said Winthrop apologetically, with the air of a schoolboy in disgrace.

"It's all right," exclaimed Eastcott, drawing a long breath. He took his wife's hand reassuringly. "I'd no idea, Nell, the papers would give out the news to-night. I meant to have talked it over with you after—er—dinner."

"But what does it mean, John? Are we going West for an automobile trip? It was only yesterday that you said you were glad to settle down for the winter in New York, and were tired of motoring over the world. We agreed that Dalmatia should be our last trip for at least a year, and we've only been home a fortnight." Mrs. Eastcott spoke rapidly, with evident dismay.

"I know it, my dear! And I meant what I said, too. But to-day has put a different face on matters. I lunched with Knight, as you know, and—well, that is the result." And Eastcott pointed to the paper in Winthrop's hand.

"'Conquer the West!' 'Blaze a Trail!'" repeated Mrs. Eastcott. "Does that mean that we're to make a road from New York to California with an automobile like a steam-roller? Or are we to cut notches and things on trees?—whittle the trunks? I didn't know automobiles could do all that."

"They can't—very easily. It's something of an adventure when they do, I believe. I'm not to build the road, dear—at least Knight hasn't suggested it yet—but I'm going to make some transcontinental maps and things."

"For Mr. Knight? Why does *he* want a road? Why doesn't he go and make it himself instead

of asking us to do it? Just when we're tired of traveling and have planned a nice, gay autumn in New York!"

"I knew you would be disappointed at the change in your plans. That is why I hesitated to tell you when I returned from the luncheon. Knight doesn't want the road or the maps for himself, of course. He has managed to persuade me that I am doing a public service by undertaking the task. I hope I am. I shall like the trip well enough, but, honestly, I wouldn't undertake it just now if the men there hadn't touched my patriotism."

"Men?" repeated Mrs. Eastcott. "Whom do you mean? What has anybody besides ourselves to do with this journey any more than with all our tours abroad?"

"Well, there were some Automobile Club men there, and one or two automobile makers; and they were all agreed that it was a disgrace, to be immediately wiped out, that America hadn't a decent road from coast to coast. Knight, having conceived the idea, will see that every stage of the journey is featured in all his newspapers *en route*; Inman will furnish me with the ideal car from his Chicago factory, so that none of our own need risk the heavy roads; somebody else will arrange an official send-off for me from—well, perhaps the top of the Liberty Statue—I hardly know or care! In fact, my dear, the enthusiasm of the occasion swept me off my feet; and now Knight has bound me to the journey by

publishing the whole plan without a moment's delay."

Eastcott again drew a long breath. As he had said, he had dreaded to confess to his wife the sudden change in his autumn plans. He knew that his absence would spoil her enjoyment of the season's gayeties. Heretofore she had always accompanied him on automobile journeys, and every tour had been for pleasure only. It was love of his own country that had sealed the fate of this autumn.

There was a long pause. Mrs. Eastcott sat down at the piano and let her fingers glide into the opening bars of the "Träumerei." Winthrop, who had discreetly left the conversation to his uncle and aunt, noticed that the tempo was uneven, as if the player's fingers trembled.

"The journey's a big undertaking, Nell," continued Eastcott gently; "but I'd like to see the West again. It's years now since I roamed the prairies as a young man. I *have* to go; and what's more, I'll get Win to go along, too, to do the presswork."

"What!" exclaimed his nephew. "You do mean it, Uncle John? Oh, what bully luck! start to-morrow, if you say so."

Only an hour before, the sunset had been behind him down the trail of the miniature canyon. He looked at his uncle incredulously, as if he hardly realize his good fortune.

Eastcott laughed. "I must have someone along to do the 'write-ups,' and Knight

gage anyone whom I suggest for the job. The sheet which you at present honor with your services can be persuaded to spare you temporarily, I suppose? "

" It will have to," said Winthrop emphatically. He was thinking of the sunset.

Suddenly Mrs. Eastcott rose. Her head was lifted high in the manner of one who had renounced the world and its vanities. She walked slowly to her husband and kissed him solemnly on his forehead.

" We'll go, John—you and Win and I," she said. " But, oh dear! All our lovely parties and musicales sacrificed on the altar of a stupid old motor car! " And she clasped her hands with pathetic despair.

Her husband looked at her in surprise. " But my dear! " he exclaimed. " I don't expect you to sacrifice yourself. It's far too hard a trip for a dainty little woman like you. You must stay comfortably here at home. Get your mother over for a visit, if you like—or meet me by rail, perhaps, in California for Christmas."

" You don't mean to suggest that you're not planning to take me with you! Am I just a ' Norah,' to be left behind in my ' Doll's House ' when there's a little hardship to be endured? Haven't I taken motor trips before? " Her voice rose from its tones of injured surprise to an almost belligerent protest.

" Of course! Of course you have, dear," he said soothingly. " But Western deserts and

Kansas muds, you know, are rather different from the smooth roads of Europe. Besides, we shall be face to face with the rough life of the trail and the hardships of the sun-scorched plains. Then, too, we shall often have to steer merely by compass, while we must take our chances on hotels or whatever accommodation we may find out on the prairies. You know you hate soiled tablecloths and bad cooking."

Mrs. Eastcott smiled scornfully.

"Pooh! Is that all? I can eat without tablecloths just as well as you men can, if it comes to that, I suppose. But I'll carry some—nice, little hemstitched things embroidered in the middle! I'll go down to McCrinkle's to-morrow and buy them. Give me a pencil, Win, so I can make a note of them. I was going to get a Renaissance luncheon-cloth, but I'll have a dozen of the others instead."

Eastcott raised his eyebrows. "You don't understand, Nell," he said, smiling in spite of himself. "This isn't a honeymoon tour. We shall be miles away from a bottle of violet water or a sachet——"

"Take them with us," suggested his wife airily.

"Moreover," continued Eastcott, skillfully ignoring her interruptions, "there'll be long runs over rougher country than you ever saw in your life. We shall get stuck in roads from which the bottom has entirely fallen out. No, you needn't suggest that we take a rope.

Knight'll send us one done up in pink tissue paper, I've no doubt! "

" I wasn't going to say anything about a rope. Let's take the Alpen-horn as a signal of distress."

" There won't be anybody but prairie dogs to answer it most of the time, and they're no trained St. Bernards, you know. It's no use, Nell—you'd be miserable. The West is not like Switzerland, or even Dalmatia."

Mrs. Eastcott looked unconvinced.

" Better not go, Aunt Nell! " ventured Winthrop, coming to his uncle's rescue. " You'd be more dead than alive when you reached California."

" Indeed I should not! I should have a beautiful time! I give you both leave to send me back by the train if I do not."

Eastcott laughed outright. His wife's spirit amused him. Winthrop leaned back in his chair nonchalantly.

" There was a fellow the other day who had seventeen blow-outs of his tires crossing the sands of Texas," remarked the young man easily. " Another chap was held up in the Louisiana swamps by a lot of roughs—you remember reading of it, Uncle?—and could only get through with drawn guns and the aid of the sheriff."

" But we're not going through the Louisiana swamps, are we? " queried Mrs. Eastcott, a trifle nervously.

Her nephew paid no attention.

" Then there was a horrible story circulated

about another man's walking across the wilds of Colorado with a broken axle on his shoulder in search of a repair shop, and his being devoured by wild beasts while his wife waited in vain for him in a lonely railroad shack."

"That was a pretty bad case," said Eastcott, taking Winthrop's cue—"pretty bad, but not half so bad as the slow death from starvation which the men faced when lost in the desert on their way to Mexico."

"Flying flags of distress for days from the top of the broken-down helpless car, and drinking their last drop of water before help came? I read about that, too."

"Awful! Transcontinentalism's no child's play," declared Eastcott.

Winthrop nodded assent. "I suppose we shall have to camp out sometimes. You don't mind that, do you, Aunt?"

"No."

"Nor the coyotes howling round the tent, of course?" suggested Eastcott.

"No-o."

"Then there are the timber wolves—big gray fellows! You don't mind them?" asked Winthrop cheerfully.

"No-o-o."

"And a grizzly or two in the forests! You don't object to their sticking their noses under the tent flap or into the tonneau when everybody's asleep?"

Mrs. Eastcott shivered surreptitiously.

“ Oh, I’ll not be afraid of them,” she declared boldly. “ I love grizzlies! Besides, if I stayed at home, I’d like to know who would be your nurse if they took a nip out of you, or if—if——”

“ And alkali water—you won’t object to drinking that, Aunt? ”

“ Certainly not.” Mrs. Eastcott brightened visibly. “ Is it a kind of spring water? ”

The young man fixed his eyes on the ceiling.

“ Well, no, not exactly,” he answered indifferently. “ It’s the desert water. It generally makes people sick. They hear queer voices and see things. Has a horrible taste, too, I believe.”

“ But surely we can always carry two or three cases of spring water with us on the automobile! ” protested Mrs. Eastcott.

“ No good, Aunt! We couldn’t carry enough, as we’re likely to be thirsty all the time. Besides, the machine itself would drink a lot of the supply; we shouldn’t want the bearings to burn up.”

She looked a little dubious. “ Does the alkali water——? But, there, I’m not afraid! I’ve no doubt it’s good for the complexion, anyway.”

Winthrop glanced at his uncle with mock seriousness.

“ Well, I don’t see, Uncle John, but that Aunt had better go. I would arrange for those shooting lessons of hers to-morrow, if I were you—cowboy style, you know—quick to draw a bead on anything, from a man to a roaring mountain lion.”

“Shooting!” exclaimed Mrs. Eastcott involuntarily, adding with a little tremble in her voice, “I’ve always wanted to shoot! I’m sure I should just love a gun.”

Winthrop regarded her thoughtfully. “Yes, you’ll be quite a hand at picking off those grizzlies, I’ve no doubt, if they get too hungry. The only thing to remember is to take a sure aim. If you lose your nerve, of course, it is all up with you.”

“Of course,” assented Mrs. Eastcott with a well-concealed shudder. “I’d better leave my rubies at home, John, I suppose.”

“Well, yes,” agreed her husband gravely. “I suppose you had. A ring, now, might perhaps come in conveniently if we met a bothersome Indian or two. They’ll often barter one’s scalp for something bright and sparkling, I understand.”

Mrs. Eastcott walked over to the piano and struck a chord nervously.

“I’ll learn to sh-shoot if you want me to, but I couldn’t part with my ri-rings,” she faltered. “You gave them to me, you know, John. I’d rather take the precious Bruges salad fork along to give the Indians, or even the jeweled miniature of Great-aunt Sophie.”

Her husband laughed approvingly. “Bravo, Nell!” he cried.

As if the laugh symbolized the withdrawal of his opposition and objections, Mrs. Eastcott exclaimed triumphantly: “There! It’s all settled!

I shall go! Oh, John, you dear, I knew you wouldn't be so cruel as to really leave me behind after all these years together! Besides, if the journey is so dangerous, I should go crazy with anxiety about you. I'll order a new tailored suit to-morrow." She rose and patted his shoulder affectionately. "Confess! Aren't you just a little bit glad I'm going, after all?"

Eastcott nodded. Then he recollected himself suddenly. "What's that? No, Nell! I'm not glad at all. I mean—I mean, dear, the matter isn't settled yet. But we won't argue about it any more to-night. To-morrow——"

"Oh, to-morrow!" cried his wife gayly. "Every man's wife knows what that means! The matter's settled, Win! When we leave discussions till to-morrow, we never begin them again."

And Mrs. Eastcott smiled tantalizingly into her husband's eyes, and led the way to dinner.

CHAPTER II

WINTHROP HAMMOND, whenever he had occasion to recall himself to his own attention, did so reluctantly. He would have infinitely preferred to dwell upon the Winthrop Hammond who should have been than upon the individual who, for reasons of State, actually bore his name. Nature had taken the liberty of giving him a figure and a countenance wholly distasteful to him, and he had never quite forgiven her. He would have been tall and he was of only medium height. He would have been handsome, with that clear-cut virility which is the attribute of the best type of American college youth, and he was only fairly good-looking. His hair was of a yellowish tan color, and he detested light hair upon a manly head. At ten he had surreptitiously treated his golden locks to a course of the family blacking-brush, and proudly sallied forth on stilts. But an unexpected shower had mortified him by washing black, trickly lines down his face, and one could not conveniently appear upon a pair of artificial legs in the society of the dining-room—a popular resort he was loath to deny himself even for the sake of pride. At twenty-five, therefore, the best he could do for his personal appearance was to wear his offensive hair cropped as

closely as consistent with a non-penitentiary record, and hold his head as high as a fun-loving and democratic spirit would allow. But he always hurried by mirrored shop-windows, and he generally contrived to keep one eye shut during the progress of the matutinal shave. For it was these eyes that added the last straw to his grudge against Nature. They were blue—a grayish but unmistakable blue! He would have bartered his treasured bit of the University “Fence” for optics black, or brown, or even green.

Had he known that Evelyn Deering was attracted by those same droll, laughing blue eyes, Winthrop would have been amazed enough. But had Dan Cupid whispered that she admired a moral code, strict almost to the Puritanical uprightness of his New England ancestors, and that she valued a set of sturdy, wholesome ideals, he would have been more than amazed. He would have been embarrassed. Even the astonishing fact that a conscience and ideals might be regarded as assets in love-making, would not have relieved that awkwardness. There were plenty of other fellows who were honest. Ideals—well-defined, prosaic affairs rather than sublimated poetry—were common enough; they were the stuff from which America was made years ago. He could not hope to impress Evelyn much with these possessions. True, he was resolved to climb the journalistic ladder even higher than the big newspaper magnate, Maxim Knight, had done. But he was not wholly in sympathy with the working

staff of the newspapers, any more than he had been with the iconoclasms of the Avenue. The journalists did not take their profession seriously. The reporters were often mercenary—many of them illiterate—inaccurate and mendacious in their reports. Journalism was synonymous, even in Mrs. Eastcott's mind, with uncouth surroundings; and as with the art of the Latin Quarter the wonder was that it could be at all productive. With every day Winthrop felt the need grow stronger within him to fashion out of the fine material of his career a journalism that was pure and honest and of which no man could be ashamed. Other dreams, more or less vague, of what he would do for his country, for the purification of politics, for young fellows who, orphaned like himself, had their own way to make, were lodged in his quiet but fertile brain. Winthrop Hammond came of good stock, and, though he knew it not, material of such sort is not so common to the potter's hand that it is likely to be neglected or cast aside.

The prospect of the journey through the West with his uncle and aunt filled him with infinite satisfaction. He was young and full of that spirit of adventure, not to be denied, which thrills in the make-up of every healthily minded and physically strong, young animal. He was to travel through a part of his country which he had never seen, a region which his uncle loved enthusiastically, and of which he himself had read for years with longing. Already he felt the fresh,

wild winds of the prairies. He saw with his mind's eye the winding path of those painted Devils of the Desert—the Apaches and Cheyennes and Pawnees—as it snaked its way into the blind recesses of the distant hills. Trail and buffalo track had played their rôle, but the thunder of a myriad hoofs and the whoops of the savage Indians, as they bore down on the emigrant trains or stampeded the flying herds into the camps of the unsuspecting Pale-faces, echoed in his ears. The cowboy, symbol of the virile life of the West, swept through his waking dreams.

“All the Indians are confined in reservations, and the cowboy is doomed to extinction like the buffalo,” Eastcott reminded him regretfully. And the older man dwelt upon the invasion of the West by the army of farmers and citizens—a moving, human throng out of the alembic of the East, ranged in regular groups as the buffaloes had been, and separating, as if at some preconcerted signal, along the countless trails which led toward the Pacific. The magic wand of Destiny had changed the Western world. Where the military fort had stood as outpost of the White Man's Law, or where the grim, gray rock had reared its head above the plains, a sentinel for the cunning savage in his thirst for the invader's blood, there had sprung up the stores and dwellings of prosperous cities and all their prosaic commonplace. Life in the West had lost its wild romance. Eastcott sighed retrospectively.

Winthrop listened to his uncle's tales. Out of

the mirage of the South—across the lofty mesas of the Mexican wilderness—over the sponge-like surface of the lava plains—from that mystic, legendary world where the Great Spirit had conceived the form of the shaggy bison to give the Red Man life—he saw in fancy the coming of the White Man's cattle. He saw them move along the buffalo tracks northward, a living stream. The same mighty herds! The same suffering! The same wholesale sacrifice to the fierce breath of the storm and to the crueller greed of man! He saw the bleating, woolly flocks, grazing on the pastures of the great-boned kine, follow, in their turn, across the plains and over the slants of the barren hills. With them was a man of mean and gypsy ways, rough, unimaginative—the common sheep-herder. The end of those great ranches, which stretched beyond the limits of human ken, was drawing near. Only in that territory of the United States, where the Mexicans were the “People” and still disputed the possession of the soil with their American supplanters, did one by chance remain. Over the once feudal proprietary of the lords of great estate, the law of “*meum et tuum*,” of the Fence and the Common Rights, now reigned almost supreme.

Winthrop's eyes grew dreamy. It was a ranch which stood in the center of all his mental pictures of the Southwest—a ranch with cottonwood trees and “pastures.” His heart quickened its beats. To see her again—to walk with her—per-

haps to tell her——! He dared to think no further.

Evelyn Deering's feelings toward himself were sealed behind her smiles and the graceful phrases of her occasional letters. Romeo had not failed where he had never ventured. The fact that she had allowed him to bind her to a half-pledge of letter writing encouraged him, and he had redeemed the pledge with frequent, large, closely written sheets—she with rare, faintly scented missives in pale blue envelopes. He did not attempt to take an exact census of the messages with which his lady-love had favored him. For some months his pockets had not been without one of those little, blue envelopes, to the contents of which he made such frequent reference that one might have supposed him to be committing even the periods and commas to memory. That the postmark of each letter was generally more or less remote history before the arrival of its lineal successor, was a circumstance that he devoutly hoped the coming journey might serve to alter.

During the fortnight that intervened, however, between Maxim Knight's publication of Eastcott's plans and the actual commencement of the tour, the blue envelopes elbowed strange companions in Winthrop's pockets, and more than once they might have had reason to be jealous of an attention divided between themselves and a motley assortment of closely written lists, maps, and guide-books.

“ Through Chicago to Omaha and Kansas City: along the Santa Fé Trail across Kansas into New Mexico: thence through Arizona to Southern California and Los Angeles ’’: the data of Eastcott’s route, scribbled on a leaf torn from a notebook, gave direction to a red-inked line that neatly traversed a map of the United States and broadened out into a big red dot that was a ranch somewhere to the southwest of Santa Fé.

“ Transcontinentalism is the latest medicine prescribed for disordered nerves,” was the opening sentence of a newspaper clipping which led the reader from nerves to the excellent condition of the roads of Algiers and Tunis, swung him gayly back to the old Roman builders of British highways, and swept him through the black gumbo mud of Iowa to the lofty, concluding phrase, “ American national ideals achieved through the matter-of-fact medium of gears and spark plugs.” A list reading, “ Two tents, two sweaters, one pair goggles, two dozen shorthand note-books,” was interlined with references on the proper method of throwing a lasso, memoranda regarding the Mormon Exodus, and notes from Bill Nye’s “ History of America.”

But Winthrop was not the only person who found himself enthusiastic concerning the details and preparations of the journey. The pioneer, looking upon the creaking, rumbling “ prairie schooner ” that was to become the instrument of his own destiny and that of his country, presumably felt less emotion than did Eastcott, who

was substituting a gasoline engine for ox and mule team. No one who knew him during these days of preparation could have any doubt that he regarded the machine and its equipment as matters of thrilling and absorbing interest. He and Winthrop spent hours in going over the "points" of the new car which arrived from Chicago. They admired its lines, its comfort, its lightness. They gave it long daily trials in the Park, often accompanied by Knight himself, who was as eager as a boy, delighted beyond measure that the journey was to become an accomplished fact, and openly congratulatory, in his ignorance, of his friend's skill in overcoming "Mrs. Eastcott's natural prejudices" and in persuading her to make one of the party.

Knight, too, had proved as good as his word in taking care that no detail of the trip was left to chance. A voluminous mass of correspondence constantly found its way into the mail-sacks of Transcontinental trains to be delivered to the Governors of various States, the Mayors of the cities along the route, and any civic organization likely to be interested in automobiling. Eastcott and his party were, in short, heralded like ambassadors of old who undertook a journey to foreign courts, their credentials and introductions prepared, their welcome fully assured. The word "Transcontinentalism" faced them in editorials, it crowned the heavy captions of news items, it sprang out upon them in telegraphic messages, it caught them unawares in the magazine

sections of the Sunday editions. For days before the start, Eastcott and his nephew found their desks inundated with the clippings of those argus-eyed creatures who devote their lives to culling from the current literature of the world, with the aid of paste and scissors, items concerning celebrities and their doings. If the travelers had any doubt before of their sudden fame, the clipping bureaus removed it and set the final seal of approval upon the journey.

But though Knight might arrange for the publicity of the undertaking, to the automobilists themselves were left the details of the equipment. Many were the hours which Winthrop and his uncle spent in the shops purchasing every conceivable convenience for a long tour. There were automobile tents with steel stakes and collapsible poles, folding camp-cots and chairs, blankets and mackintoshes. Everything, it seemed, must be constructed on the collapsible principle—cooking outfit, buckets, and water-filters—until Mrs. Eastcott sarcastically suggested that the car itself should be arranged to collapse also. There were queer things like duffle bags and gunny sacks and South African water bags which were guaranteed to furnish cool refreshment to the parched throats of the automobilists on scorching plains or deserts. There was a never-failing serum for snake bites, which had to be falsely labeled that it might not give alarm to the feminine member of the party. There were axes, spades, ropes, and block and tackle, destined to become the weapons of offense

and defense whenever the car entered into mortal combat with deep sands, the uncertain depths of bridgeless streams, and the high banks of dry river-beds and gullies. To complete the varied assortment, there was Mrs. Eastcott's wardrobe—reduced, with infinite tact on her husband's part, to the minimum of hat-boxes and suitcases—and there were compasses, aneroid barometers, thermometers, odometers, speedometers, and what looked like a full equipment for the navigation of a ship on trackless seas.

It was a secret relief to Mrs. Eastcott to find that the greater part of the bulky and weighty camping outfit would not be required before the party reached the Rockies, and that her husband intended to express it to the vicinity of Santa Fé to await his arrival. There was enough feminine impedimenta left, however, to put the space in the car available for human occupancy at a premium.

“It looks like a ship's hull, sadly in need of a barnacle scrape,” said Winthrop to a friend on the morning of departure as he pointed to the automobile with its array of queerly shaped sacks and packages.

The new machine was standing in front of the Club, and the party of Transcontinentalists was surrounded by a large and admiring group of friends and onlookers. The sun shone brightly; a light wind fluttered the banners, and above the car, from an open window, extended a long staff about which was wrapped the flag that was to be officially unfurled at the moment of departure.

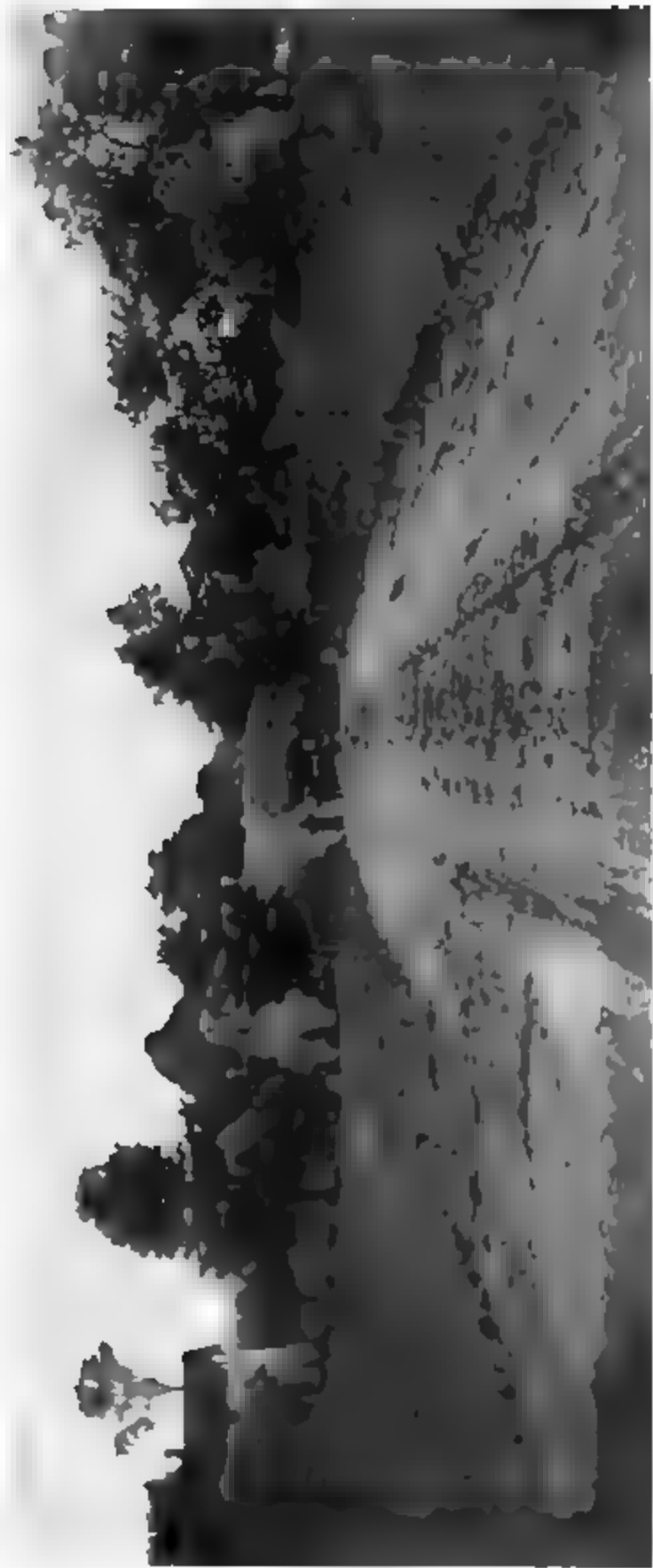
“Who’s your chauffeur?” asked Winthrop’s friend, nodding toward the man who stood beside the heavily laden car. “Reliable chap, I suppose?”

“Said to be all one could desire! He came on from Chicago yesterday. Goes with the car, like a trading stamp! He’s thoroughly familiar with the West, and much better for our purpose than my uncle’s usual man. But he’s a clam—hasn’t opened his mouth—I mean his shell—since he got here.”

“Well, if he sticks as close as the barnacles, you’re all right! Your aunt’s getting enough flowers and candy for an ocean voyage. Look at those roses!”

The new chauffeur paid no attention to the crowd of curious observers, but continued to stand, with folded arms, intent on every detail of his machine. The glossy paint which shone on the green sides, the polished brass, the neat leather cushions—he inspected them all grimly with the air of one who had done his best with them, but would even, at the last moment, better his best. Several times he reached out a muscular hand and tried the straps which fastened the gunny sacks, stuffed to bursting, on the running boards. In spite of the stolidity of his square-jawed, young face, there was evident a certain pride in the automobile and its equipment.

“All aboard!” called Eastcott at last, looking at his watch and shaking hands with Maxim Knight.



"The automobile was spinning smoothly along through a rolling landscape

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Winthrop led his aunt toward the car. "Oh, how shall I ever creep in?" she exclaimed. "Is John to drive at first? And is that little corner next him for me? And what has become of the tonneau?"

The nephew laughed. The "barnacles" gave every indication that the seating spaces in the automobile had been contrived for beings of a new and legless variety.

"Lost in a few route books and maps, and a lot of hat-boxes with your fall bonnets, my dear Aunt," said Winthrop. "That's what happens when men are so soft-hearted as to take a lady along. It's lucky the car is sweet-tempered."

"I hope it's better tempered than the new chauffeur," remarked his aunt in a low voice. "I feel very doubtful, Win, about trusting our lives to a man who never speaks."

"He'll attend strictly to business, that's sure," said Winthrop consolingly.

Mrs. Eastcott sighed audibly and settled herself gingerly in her corner of the car. She laid her flowers across her lap. Then she leaned over the side and spoke confidentially to one of her friends.

"Don't whisper it to anybody, Amy, but I'm dreadfully nervous about the journey. Oh, no! Of course I didn't really have to learn to shoot, with three men along. But we have to go over miles and miles of rough roads and trestles, and to bump the railroad ties and follow bear tracks, and sleep in dry river beds, and—— Yes, I'm ready, John! I was just telling Amy what a

glorious time we are going to have. I declare she is positively envious! ”

Eastcott, standing with one foot on the step, shook hands with Knight again. “ Yes, we’re out for an adventure! All in! Win! McNulty! ”

Mrs. Eastcott smiled bewilderingly. “ Do you like it, really, dear? ” she said hastily, leaning again to her feminine supporter, and patting the skirt of her dark tweed suit. “ I wanted a pale lavender to match this beautiful gold-mounted hand-bag you gave me for the trip, but my husband said I must be sensible. ‘ Not at all,’ said I. ‘ Would you have me dress like a suffragist just because I am crossing America? ’ But of course—— Good-by! Good-by! ”

The Stars and Stripes flung themselves joyously to the breeze. A cheer went up from the crowd. Maxim Knight waved his hand; feminine handkerchiefs fluttered; cameras snapped. The spectators cheered again.

The momentous journey had begun.

CHAPTER III

As the car glided gently into the yawning jaws of the Hudson River ferry boat, Winthrop was conscious of a sudden sense of jubilation which momentarily increased until it achieved the proportions of a very real and exhilarating ecstasy. The broad, majestic stream, which dwarfed the boat, the car, and the passengers alike to insignificance, was the Rubicon beyond which lay the possible fulfillment of his most treasured and sacred dreams. The great task of spanning a Continent, into which the larger part of Europe could be rolled and lost, seemed to suddenly uplift him, in his own estimation, till the realization of those dreams looked more probable than it had ever done before. His eyes traveled along the sparkling sweep of the river to the tree-clothed promontories and the site of the old forts of the Revolution, then upwards to the bluffs ahead. Beyond—many miles to the south-west—waited Evelyn Deering. Had she received the letter which told of his journey? Was she glad that he was coming?

McNulty sat silently in the opposite corner of the tonneau, looking stolidly ahead at the clear-cut skyline of the lofty Palisades. Conscious of a sudden friendliness for all the world, Winthrop

turned and inspected his neighbor cheerfully. The man's face was as expressionless as a paste-board mask. He was silent but without any particular deference in his manner. But Winthrop noticed that the sharp eyes frequently turned from the landscape to inspect the car. It was evident that whatever his indifference to his passengers, the man was attentive enough to his automobile.

"Fine view, McNulty?" Winthrop said tentatively to the figure beside him.

"Yes, sir," McNulty acquiesced perfunctorily.

Winthrop considered him with friendly curiosity.

"Like New York?"

"Yes, sir!" McNulty leaned over the mud-guard, professionally surveying the tire.

"You're looking forward to the trip, I suppose?"

McNulty reached over at a dangerous angle to snap the loose lid of the tool-box on the running board. "Yes, sir!" His voice sounded half strangled as he swung back into his seat again.

"Great country—the West?"

The chauffeur fixed his eyes critically on the spare odometer in the tonneau before replying.

"Yes, sir!"

Conversation being now in a consumptive condition, Winthrop settled himself contentedly to his own thoughts and whistled gayly in time with the throb of the engines.

As the car spun along the broad, country road

and through a pleasant, pastoral scene, set off by distant hills, the glory of an American autumn was everywhere apparent. Already the foliage had put on that radiant flush which is the hint of an "Indian summer" yet to burst like a late-budding flower upon the landscape. The reddish brown of the oaks mingled with the pale yellow of the beeches; the horse chestnuts, decked out in green and russet, tossed their arms to gaunt black-hickories beyond the parti-colored sumacs. Golden-rod and chicory waved fading colors by the roadside. Ragged patches of road were littered with yellowing tepees of towering reeds and with the golden globes of fat pumpkins. Blue and white wings flashed in the trees above, as the noisy blue-jays screamed challenge to the travelers, and once a ruby-crowned kinglet alighted on a fence rail, his bright little head reflecting the glory of the trees. On every side the colors of the autumn were intensified and focussed by the scarlet flame of the red maples—living fingers of fire that pointed to the eternal joy of the season of seed-time and harvest.

Presently, as the car rolled over the lazy, green-banked Saddle River, Eastcott's voice rose above the hum of the machinery.

"Suppose we get the big camera into commission, Win!"

As Winthrop unstrapped the photographic outfit, Mrs. Eastcott looked longingly at the red and yellow sumac boughs.

"Let us be truly gay," she said, "and add

autumn leaves to roses. McNulty, will you cut me some branches over there? ”

McNulty bowed with a cold air of detachment from the brilliant scene of the autumn.

“ What do you think is the matter with the man? ” she asked in a stage aside as she watched him perform his task. “ I believe he has something on his mind. I don’t like him at all.”

“ More likely has something on his stomach, and it doesn’t agree with him,” said her husband sentimentally.

“ I wish I could make him out,” sighed Mrs. Eastcott plaintively.

“ No good, my dear ; give up trying. Chauffeurs and their ailments represent the last thing in the animal world, and man has not yet wholly understood the latest creation. Now then, Win, press your bulb—we’re looking pleasant.”

When the car sped forward again, along the road to the Ramapo Valley, the tonneau was transformed into a bower of autumn beauty, McNulty sitting grimly incongruous among the waving red and yellow leaves.

“ Just look under the cushions of the tonneau, Win, and you’ll find my little red book on the legends of this region,” directed Mrs. Eastcott as they approached the charming spot which forms so appropriate a precursor of the folk-lore of the Catskills beyond.

Winthrop made an obedient dive, and with considerable muscular effort pulled out a flat, square package.

“ Not that! ” cried Mrs. Eastcott. “ That has the silver spoons for picnics on the desert.”

Winthrop made a second dive, and this time came to the surface, after much fumbling, with a red face and something like a muttered imprecation on his lips. He was holding a small, hard ball wrapped in paper.

“ Good Heavens, Aunt Nell, I’ve almost murdered myself down there! How many porcupines did you bring? ”

Mrs. Eastcott laughed. “ You’ve got the pin-cushion, Win! McNulty, I wish you would look for the book, please! ”

“ You’d better put on your gloves first,” admonished Winthrop ruefully.

“ Yes, sir,” said the chauffeur mechanically.

There was a prolonged tugging and a general dislocation of all the parcels and boxes of the tonneau, and McNulty at last arose from his knees holding the lost treasure in his grimy hand. Mrs. Eastcott seized it with eagerness, and while Winthrop and the chauffeur smoothed their ruffled plumage, she read aloud, in jerky, disjointed phrases, punctuated by the swing of the car, the quaint story of the Ramapo Salamander of old, which, out of flames, sprang into life in the valley every seven years.

Eastcott, who was driving, kept up a running fire of interpolation. “ Going to lunch at Tuxedo with the McGrewberrys, Win.”—“ Hungry enough to eat your old Salamander myself, Nell.”—“ Flung the saintly humbug into the furnace at

last, did he? Bully for Baron Hugo! That's the proper kind of revenge on a salamander that kills nice little wives! "

Winthrop's eyes were on the landscape. He did not see McNulty suddenly stoop to lift a bit of cardboard from the floor of the tonneau. But when Mrs. Eastcott had finished her whimsical recital, he felt McNulty's hand touch him on the shoulder. On the man's face there was a look of startled surprise. He appeared like one rudely awakened from a sleep.

" Did you drop this, sir? " McNulty asked. He held out the photograph of a girl.

Winthrop suddenly flushed a fiery red. " Yes—thanks."

He seized the photograph guiltily and thrust it into his pocket. What the deuce did McNulty mean, holding her picture in his great chauffeur's paw! What an idiot he himself had been not to notice that it had dropped on the floor of the tonneau during the search for the book! He thrust the photograph deeper into his pocket with a jealous frown as the car turned into the broad driveway which leads to Tuxedo—that picturesque colony which protests against encroaching Democracy—the millionaire's pleasant means of temporary escape from the environment of the common herd.

Society has ensconced itself in feudal exclusiveness, proclaiming its inalienable right to define its own limits and to segregate itself in gregarious clusters, making its own laws, living



"Ragged patches of road were lined with yellowing tepees."

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its own life. Self-made, and formed of elements liable to easy disintegration, it fights here and at Newport for its very existence in the naïve medievalism of impregnable walls and haughty isolation. Strange, contradictory, lovable Tuxedo—the peculiar outgrowth of the conditions of American society! The Mecca of ennuied week-enders, the scene of Thanksgiving and New Year balls, the brief Spring haunt of those gay beings who open their country houses for the same festivities that have bored them during the City's winter or beneath Florida's sunny skies! Tuxedo, the plaything of the Rich, the fairyland of Nature and Loveliness!

It was after luncheon, on the broad veranda of her friend's house, that Mrs. Eastcott drew Winthrop aside.

“Win,” she said in a low voice, “I saw that picture over my shoulder—the one that McNulty picked up a little while ago. It was the photograph of a—girl!”

“I believe you're right, Aunt Nell,” said Winthrop with an attempt at nonchalance.

“A girl, Win—treasured in your pocket?” She regarded him with as motherly a look as she could muster. “It is my duty to be inquisitive about the affairs of a lonely ‘orphan,’ you know.”

“Humph!” grunted Winthrop.

“Tell me, is she a New York girl?”

“Of course she's not, Aunt Nell,” answered the “orphan” restively. “By the way, I think Uncle John's trying to catch your eye.”

“ Let him catch it! ” remarked Mrs. Eastcott recklessly. “ Win, you must make a clean breast of this affair to me. I am sure it is an *affaire d’amour*. Is she a New Englander? ”

“ Certainly not! McNulty, I see, is bringing the car out of the garage,” said Winthrop suggestively.

“ Then she is a Westerner! ”

“ If you say so, Aunt. Perhaps we’ll drop in some afternoon at the ranch and give her a call.”

This time his tone betrayed more eagerness than impatience. After all it was rather a relief to him to speak of Evelyn to someone, and doubtless his aunt would be sympathetically inclined to plead with her husband for a visit to the ranch while they were passing through New Mexico.

“ A call—a ranch! ” repeated Mrs. Eastcott with significant emphasis. “ I knew you were tremendously pleased about something. Are you in love—with—a—cowgirl? ”

Winthrop laughed. “ That’s about it! ” he admitted. “ Her father has a ranch in New Mexico. He is Colonel Deering—a fine fellow whom you and uncle will like immensely. The ranch, I understand, has more or less historic association with the romantic days of Mexican rule. I know it has a *hacienda* like the one of the Morenos in ‘ Ramona.’ Miss Deering is devoted to it—that is, now that she has given up the settlement work in Chicago.”

“ Settlement work! ” repeated his aunt. “ Then she’s a college girl—or was. College girls

always go in for something serious, and I understand that settlements are their favorite hobbies."

"And a mighty good hobby, too, Aunt." Winthrop bristled up with the air of a champion whose favorite had been attacked. "When a sweet, pretty girl gives herself to helping those poor devils in the—well, I just wish you could read her letters."

"Oh, ho! Writes letters, does she?" crowed Mrs. Eastcott delightedly. "I believe you've one in your pocket now, young man! The pretty college girl will see that you're entertained at the ranch—though probably she'll be back at her old work in Chicago. It generally develops into a kind of craze with blue-stockings."

"No, she won't!" said Winthrop. "She came East last summer for a rest. That's when I met her. She has been at the ranch these three months."

"Overworked, I suppose, poor child!" murmured Mrs. Eastcott sympathetically. "She's evidently a generous creature. I suppose she has a name, Win?"

Winthrop grinned awkwardly. "Evelyn"—he said—"Evelyn Deering."

"Evelyn! That's a good name. Is she tall? Is she stout or slender? What color are her eyes? Oh, Win, what fun we shall all have! I promise to help you to come back engaged."

"But, Aunt Nell," protested Winthrop hurriedly, "I'm afraid there isn't any love affair—at least not so far as Miss Deering's concerned."

She isn't the kind of girl Tom, Dick, and Harry can please! And I——"

"The very idea! You! You're good enough for the best girl living! And you shall have this Evelyn if I've anything to say about it. Of course you have written her that you're coming in the automobile?"

"Well, I—dropped her a line to that effect."

"Then, just wait till we get to New Mexico." And Mrs. Eastcott turned away to bid farewell to her host and hostess with an expression that almost matched her nephew's in joyous anticipation.

That afternoon, as the Catskills beyond Tuxedo began to show their soft, undulating summits, Winthrop fancied McNulty, as well as his aunt, watched him with surreptitious interest. More than once, looking up suddenly, he caught the chauffeur's eye upon him. But the glance, once detected, always turned hastily to the landscape.

White clouds—great toy-balloons—floated lazily across the afternoon sky. Streams, farmland, and villages swept by in the changing moving-picture-show of Nature. Here the ancient town of Newburgh guarded the old, brown house that was Washington's headquarters—there across the river stood Fishkill, where the Colonial legislature held its early sessions and Lafayette lay so long ill—beyond, the Rondout River spilled itself in mighty splurges of shadow and light, veining the dark rocks with the white foam of Rifton Falls,

while pines and firs on either bank leaned attentive to the roaring pæan.

Next day the smooth road plunged boldly among the hills, away from the Hudson and through the numerous summer resorts of the Esopus Valley, amidst wooded tangles or smiling fields. Civilization and the Wild challenged each other, and the ghosts of the old Knickerbockers who had peopled the Sleepy Hollows and roamed the wooded slopes of yore, were strangely replaced by the substantial, material forms of the Wandering Jew in *villagiatura*. Dutch names and legends, mingled with the wild, poetic imagery of the Indians, furnished the only sign of the Flying Dutchmen whose vanishing figures brushed Irving's fancy as they passed.

Several times Mrs. Eastcott tossed chocolate creams from the box in her lap to groups of children staring on the sidewalk. "They ought to be fat little Dutch babies," she remarked. "They should come trooping out of the doorways and surround the car in their solemn Dutch way, while the Good Fairy—your wife, John—pours toothsome morsels into their outstretched hands."

The ribbon path skirted the foot of the glorious hills, and the smooth, unbroken line of their reddish-green crests stood out clear against an iridescent, azure sky. The distant clusters of trees might have been a dense herd of buffalo grazing on hidden grasses. Here and there one had straggled loose from the herd and gazed, a solitary

sentinel, from its elevated vantage point, at the strange sight of the scudding automobile.

“Hudson and his crew visited these mountains—became shrunken—distorted by the magic distillation—discovered by Rip Van Winkle, and——” Mrs. Eastcott laid the book of legends down despairingly as the car jolted along the highway.

“I’ll match you for a legend,” said Eastcott. “What if these hills were the bones of a monster that fed on human beings until the Great Spirit turned it into stone as it was floundering toward the ocean to bathe? What if the two lakes near the summit were gleaming eyes? How’s that for Indian?”

Winthrop leaned forward gayly.

“I can better that with the Indian witch who had the life job of turning on the weather for the Hudson Valley and who played duenna for Day and Night. When she wasn’t busy smoothing out their quarrels, she cut up the old moons into stars, and spun clouds on Round Top and North Mountain. If you look sharp, you’ll still see her flinging them to the winds.”

Mrs. Eastcott regarded the hills thoughtfully.

“It’s a pretty story. I’d like to cut up moons into stars—or better still into honey-moons. What a fairyland I could make for lovers!” She looked at Winthrop slyly, and questioned him with eyes upon his pocket but with silent lips: “May I—see—photograph?”

He shook his head with embarrassment. But

as soon as she turned away, he drew forth the photograph furtively. Screening it with his hand, he studied it long and tenderly—the girlish figure in white—the dark expressive eyes set in an oval face of perfect contours—the large, picture hat framing wavy, luxuriant hair.

As he looked at it, a delicious illusion stole over his senses. Evelyn was near him. He could hear her voice and see her changing smile. Musing with half-closed eyes, he shared the incidents of the journey with her. They admired the same views, their laughter rang in unison. She clapped her hands in delight.

He turned eagerly. McNulty sat beside him, matter-of-fact and indifferent as ever. Mrs. Eastcott was greeting with enthusiasm a gayly decorated pilot-car which had come out from Binghamton to greet the Transcontinentalists.

Ten minutes more and Winthrop escaped from the local enthusiasts and strode to the hotel desk.

“Mail for Mr. Eastcott’s party?” he asked with ill-concealed eagerness.

The clerk handed him a small, blue envelope forwarded from New York. It bore his own name and an unexpected, Chicago postmark. He tore it open hastily.

“Hotel ———

“Chicago, October — 19—.

“*My dear ‘Sir Winthrop’*:

“Father and I are delighted to think that your rubber-shod steed is bringing you across the Con-

continent. Imagine that I burn a candle every day in the adobe church of my New Mexican pueblo for your good fortune. Can't you hear the Enchanted Mesa's siren song in the Forgotten Land?

"You and Mr. and Mrs. Eastcott will be more than welcome at the ranch. But we shall not have to wait until you arrive in New Mexico to greet you, for we have been in the Windy City for a fortnight, and shall remain here until your arrival. Whip up your steed, therefore, Sir Knight, that it may bring you quickly along the way. Until next week, then, *au revoir*, and may the weather be kind to you.

"Sincerely your friend,

"EVELYN DEERING."

The news which the letter conveyed was as surprising as it was welcome. But in the next few hours, after the first rush of amazed delight had passed, Winthrop realized that it found him unprepared. New Mexico had seemed remote; its mountain wildernesses, bathed in sunshine and mystery and in the tremulous hush of the day-long noon, had been a world removed. He would have had plenty of time to think out his plan of campaign ere he crossed the frontiers into that Promised Land. But now all his manly resolves, formed for the purpose of capturing that tender citadel, basely deserted him, leaving the once bold lover without the shred of a plan of attack to help him out of his dilemma.

With the first throb of the engines next day, however, he became conscious of a restless craving for the presence of his lady. By the time the car had traversed the valleys of the Susquehanna and the Caucaiyuta, in the center of the Empire State, he was secretly ready to construe every delay or detour as a conspiracy of Fortune against his love.

The Falls of Montour, heralding the beauties of Watkins Glen—the brilliantly wooded slopes that rivaled the Catskills in gentle loveliness—the chain of shimmering lakes elongated like their soft Indian names—all these wrung from him an admiration that was yet an inward prayer for speed. But there was a social call here and there—a little visit to friends of the Eastcotts at Geneva—and at Rochester a luncheon with some distinguished citizens, who dwelt much upon the differences between this twentieth century flight in a thirty horse-powered automobile and the journey of old Colonel Rochester, who brought a train of women and servants, wagons and furniture carts to this “pleasant valley” of the “Wild West” a hundred years before.

Winthrop found every delay on the road to Evelyn irksome. At another time he might have angled in his memory for school-day stories of the Indian Five Nations which fought for supremacy in this region about Niagara; he might have given a reminiscent thought to the gleaming eyes of the Pale-faces who peered across the shining waters of the lake with the coming of La Houtan.

But now he was a prey to a nervous impatience that stretched into leagues the miles through the grape-vine country along the Erie shore. He was more interested in the welcome of the bevy of automobilists who greeted the Eastcott car outside Cleveland than he was in any remembrance of the bronzed warriors who paddled down each autumn to the mouth of the Cuyahoga River and scattered through the forests for trade, or even in old Moses Cleveland, who laid out the city, or Tabitha Stiles, the famous housekeeper of the old colony. But he frankly acknowledged to himself that he was only interested in the welcome itself because it marked progress to Chicago, and that the farewells, which signified that the journey was again under way, were infinitely more to his liking.

As the automobile rolled along the shore road to Toledo, Winthrop was seized with the half-nightmare feeling that he was out on a vain quest for the limit of man's progress—that he was doomed to motor on for Eternity, never to reach the goal. Old landmarks stood on every side—outposts of a civilization less than a decade gone by, but even now left behind in the forward rush, the rush for elbow room, for earth conquest, for all that makes for advancing civilization. Was the East, then, no longer the *ultima thule* of humanity? Westward rose ever higher the ascending scale of man's culture and accomplishment? Somewhere out there by the sinking sun, perhaps, lay man's Heaven—his highest Destiny. Was the

West to redeem for the East its birthright of intellect and advancement?

The last hours of the run to Chicago tried Winthrop's patience more than all the days since he left New York. Mrs. Eastcott, with sympathetic excitement, noted the flush on his sunburned face and the nervous pitch of his voice. Eastcott, glad enough in his own way to have taken so long a stride toward the West that was luring him, grasped the wheel with a steady hand and hastened the pace.

And then——

Chicago at last, and the roar and ceaseless motion of busy, street traffic! Chicago and the Frontiers where East had joined West but yesterday!

At a crowded corner, the great moving wedge of wheeled humanity was arrested for a moment by the stalwart arm of the law, when an abrupt exclamation from McNulty attracted the attention of his fellow-travelers. He was pointing in the direction of the curb.

“ There he is! There's the man! ”

The Eastcotts and Winthrop stared at him in astonishment.

The “ clam ” had opened his shell.

CHAPTER IV

THERE is no surer way of creating a demand for one's discourse than to let the market run short of supply. Then a single exclamation abruptly tendered or dropped casually into the conversational Stock Exchange has all the melodramatic effect of a bomb.

The unexpectedness of the chauffeur's remark would thus in any case have electrified the party. But if the mute McNulty had schemed for effect, he could not have chosen a better moment for his sensational announcement.

"Where? Who?" cried Eastcott.

Winthrop had hastily followed the direction of McNulty's finger. A tall, well-dressed man, standing alone near a doorway, was regarding the dusty automobile and its occupants with a supercilious smile. Winthrop had just time to note that the stranger was a handsome fellow, of a Spanish type of coloring and feature, before a passing vehicle interrupted the view.

He turned abruptly to the chauffeur.

"Do you mean that foreign looking chap?" he asked.

But McNulty had relapsed into his usual stolidity, and his whole attention appeared to be concentrated upon the stream of traffic. When Win-

throp turned again the man had disappeared, and by the time the automobile had arrived at the hotel, the travelers had all but forgotten the incident in the clamorous attention of the welcoming crowd.

Within the lobby, Winthrop was besieged by the usual contingent of the Press. Handing out his "copy," he searched eagerly for the familiar face of Colonel Deering; then, with good-natured haste, he shook off his colleagues and made his way through the reception rooms. Neither the Colonel nor his daughter were anywhere to be seen.

Winthrop, telling himself that it was absurd to suppose his friends would have been awaiting him in the crowd, hurried to the office, his heart beating, his face flushed and expectant. With difficulty he steadied his voice and made inquiry.

The clerk, true to his kind, was busy with a score of the petty details of a hotel office. He answered rapidly without looking up, at the same time giving orders to several clamoring bell boys.

"Deerings?"—"Take that to No. 214!"—"Gone, sir."

"Gone?" gasped Winthrop. "Gone?"

"Yes, sir.—Here, Page, find out if party in 708 is in!"

Winthrop, suddenly pale, reached for a metaphorical straw.

"Oh, yes! Gone out, you mean?"

"Return at eight o'clock!—No, sir. I spoke to the lady there! Deerings have left the city!"

“ When—when did they go? ” stammered Winthrop.

The man looked up from the ledger hastily.

“ Two days ago, sir.” The blankness of his inquirer’s face seemed to arrest his attention.

“ Sorry, sir,” he added mechanically.

Winthrop suppressed his feelings with a wrench.

“ Did they leave any message? ” he asked.

The clerk glanced rapidly in the lettered pigeon holes.

“ Sorry again, sir. Left nothing.”

“ No address? Nor word as to when they are coming back? ”

“ No, sir. Nothing.”

The words fell like ice on the fire of an eager heart. Winthrop made his way mechanically to where he saw Eastcott standing with a few remaining pressmen.

“ Why, man, you look as though an earthquake had struck you,” exclaimed his uncle, stepping aside from the group.

“ The Deerings are not here! ” said Winthrop dully.

“ Not here? ” repeated Eastcott in astonishment. “ Why, you told us they wrote that they would meet you here.”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, where are they? ”

“ I don’t know. They’ve left.” The young man turned on his heel as if to hide a rebellious resentment at Fate.

“ But they’re in Chicago? ”

“ No! ”

“ Then you have a message? ”

“ No! ” said Winthrop bluntly. “ No! ”

Eastcott made no effort to detain him, but followed him with his eyes as he walked slowly away. “ Well! Well! ” he thought. “ Nell told me it was a love affair, but it doesn’t look like it. It’s the old story, I suppose—many a slip ’twixt the letter and the lip! I’m glad I’ve got my squaw safe upstairs! ” And he laughed lightly.

Winthrop made his way gloomily down the marble stairs leading into the spacious café of the hotel. A myriad shaded lights shone through a low, vaulted room heavily encrusted with the medieval ornamentation of a typical German “ Keller.” It was still early for the regular diners, but many of the tables were already occupied by a noisy, vociferous assortment of guests who were planning for an evening at the theaters.

In spite of her letter, Evelyn had broken her promise to meet him! Winthrop felt ashamed of his former eagerness. She was at heart indifferent to him. Perhaps she had guessed the real nature of his devotion and wished as her greatest kindness to avoid any further acquaintance.

He threw himself heavily into a cushioned chair at a remote table, waving the importunate waiter aside. He must think—think—he must face the present situation. For days he had been counting the hours to his meeting with Evelyn. How would she look? How would she greet him? Would he find a change in the girl he had known

in those halcyon summer days of the East? Every thought of her had quickened his pulses. She had stirred the ambitions within him. She had been mysteriously and agreeably connected with all his aspirations. With her acquaintance had been born his resolve to make a name for himself. Visions of her had mingled with his professional work. He could not disassociate his daily actions from an involuntary concession to her possible approval. His was indeed the temper which would make of the object of its passion the guide and inspiration of life. The matter-of-fact clerk with that single word "Gone!" had dispelled visions, shattered a thousand ideals.

"Dinner, sir?" The voice came as from a distance. "Waiting for a friend, sir?"

The unintentional irony of the remark roused him.

"No," he said. "Serve me steak for one."

"Friend?" Was he after all doing Evelyn an injustice? Was she who had called forth all that was best in him, less than noble herself?

Every look—every word which she had uttered or written to him—gave the lie to this supposition. He drew forth a little packet of her letters from his pocket and read passages from them eagerly, thirstily. Yes, he knew it—such a girl could not be other than true to herself and her—friendship!

The anti-climax of that word! Was it for friendship he was journeying across the Continent? But what was to be done? Already his

interest in the trip was slipping away, and the ranch loomed on his horizon, an elusive mirage of the desert. Should he go on with his uncle and aunt to California? Or should he arrange for a recall from his newspaper?

A sudden tide of ambition swept over him. He would go on; the opportunity for professional advancement was too good to be lightly cast aside. In a flash he realized that the ambition which his love had engendered was as strong as love itself.

The advent of the waiter with the steaming dish broke the chain of his reflections, and he began his dinner with an unexpected appetite. The physical inertia which had seized him was passing away. He felt more like a man ready for action.

Where was Evelyn? How could he find her? His journalistic mind set itself keenly to work on the details of her discovery. Had she gone back to the ranch? Had she and her father left the hotel with the intention of immediately returning and had some accident occurred? Mrs. Eastcott herself could not have conjured up more dreadful pictures of possible disaster than those which flitted through the lover's mind in the next five minutes.

“ Mr. Hammond! Mr. H-a-m-mond! ”

Winthrop started as though the bell of a flying ambulance was clanging ominously through the room.

“ Mr. H-a-a-mmond! Mr. H-a-a-a-mmond! ”

A multi-buttoned page, moving among the

tables, drawled out the name in a shrill, insistent treble. Winthrop held up his hand. The voice ceased, and the lad extended a salver on which lay a small visiting card.

“ Emilio Maria Santos.”

The name conveyed nothing to Winthrop. “ There’s a mistake here,” he said. “ I don’t know the person.”

“ Name on the other side, sir.”

Winthrop reversed the card, and read his own penciled name.

“ Where is the gentleman? ”

“ In the smoking lounge by the palms, sir.”

“ Good! Ask him to wait.”

Suddenly his eye was attracted by the address upon the visiting card:

“ Santa Fé, New Mexico.”

“ New Mexico! ” Did his caller know the Deerings? Had they given the man a message—news that would set all doubts and fears at rest?

Winthrop sprang from his seat and seized his hat, almost upsetting the waiter who was standing in the direct line of retreat with the bill obsequiously extended. The arrest of the flight was but momentary. Winthrop paid the account hastily and rushed up the steps to the lobby above. In the smoker’s lounge he stood hesitating for a second by the enormous lamp which threw his

features into strong relief. His light hair, his ruddy face, and the good-natured *bonhomie* which shone through his sturdy New England masculinity, made him a fine example of the civilization of the American East. He looked about the room doubtfully.

A man rose from the corner seat near the huge, decorative ingle nook. He had been smoking a cigarette, but now he took the fragrant weed from between his lips and smiled.

As the stranger came within the rays of the lamp, Winthrop started back. The man whom he had seen that afternoon—the man to whom McNulty had pointed—stood there before him!

He scrutinized his caller, conscious of a sudden mistrust, and drew himself up with instinctive reserve.

The Mexican was the first to speak.

“Señor Hammond—Señor Winthrop Hammond?”

His voice had that rare quality, half devotion, half courtesy, which made the words unconscious flattery. His smile displayed two rows of gleaming white teeth behind full, Oriental lips.

Winthrop bowed in his most matter-of-fact manner.

“At your service, Mr. ——?”

“Emilio Santos, Señor Hammond.” The visitor seized the other’s hand and shook it enthusiastically, bowing low.

“It is indeed a pleasure to meet you.” He shook the phlegmatic hand again as if to make

sure that his interlocutor was fully aware of the exact amount of pleasure experienced.

Winthrop pointed to a seat.

The stranger seemed in no hurry to announce the exact nature of his errand, but repeated in an undertone that this "Was indeed a very great pleasure." Then, apparently satisfied with that final expression of his ebullient feelings, he slowly drew forth a handsomely chased, silver cigarette box and, keeping his eye upon his host, gracefully offered its contents.

The man's profound civility annoyed the Easterner. Lighting the cigarette, Winthrop ran his eyes up and down his caller.

Emilio Santos was a handsome, mustachioed individual, apparently about thirty years of age, with a swagger, almost bravura air—a man in whom the unconventional habits of the West were singularly combined with the courteous formalities of Old Castile. From the ancient strain of his forefathers, he had inherited flashes of Moorish fire; in his cheeks there lingered still the pigment of the burning suns of Spanish plains, and his eyes were luminous with a light which glowed or clouded according to the play of his most trivial emotions. His hair was glossy and jet black, his features regular and handsome to a fault. He wore evening dress—a garb that fitted him immaculately and as tightly as a glove. A velvet collar gave a touch of theatricality to his appearance, and as he smoked his cigarette, he conveyed to his *vis-à-vis* the impression that he was ex-

tracting from the weed much artistic enjoyment. A greater contrast to Winthrop Hammond than Emilio Santos it would have been hard to find.

“ May I ask to what I owe the honor of this call, Mr. Santos? ” asked Winthrop coldly, unpleasantly conscious of the other’s fixed regard.

An infinite sadness clouded the Mexican’s sensitive features.

“ Ah! I have not explained! A thousand pardons, Señor Hammond! I forget the ways of the Americanos, which say ever ‘ come to the point.’ The Americanos tell not to the world their feelings, and yet I tell you, Mr. Hammond, I admire you! ”

Winthrop, rather taken aback, laughed. “ You flatter me, Mr. Santos! ” he protested.

“ No, no, Señor! They say I am an Americano too, like you, *compadre!* Is it not so? But I tell you I admire you because I find that you are to explore my country in an automobile. It is wonderful! ”

The traveler bowed his acknowledgments. The man had an air of sincerity; at any rate his accompanying gestures made him picturesque.

“ I’m afraid, sir, you are judging our trip by newspaper exaggerations—my own, perhaps. We mean to cross the Continent, that’s all.”

Señor Santos shook his head smilingly.

“ Have I not seen with my own eyes the arrival of the Señor and his friends in his automobile? Ah, this crowd of all the great of Chicago to meet you! These bravos of the people! Have I not

seen Señor Eastcott borne in triumph into the hotel, with the fair Señora—the brave and handsome Señora! ” The speaker made a gallant motion of his hand and mouth as if he were throwing a complimentary kiss to the absent lady. “ Yes, I saw the arrival of the conquerors—I, who like all Mexicans, admire a conqueror—and I vowed to myself that I would not rest until I had shaken hands with the Señor Hammond and told him how much I admire him—I, Emilio Santos! ”

The Mexican rose and bowed. Then he extended his hand again. This time Winthrop noticed that it felt soft, like a woman’s, but there was a pressure in its grasp which astonished the Easterner with unexpected muscular vigor.

“ You must see my uncle, Mr. Eastcott. He is the leader of the party, and if there is any praise, he ought to get it! He’d be glad to meet you. He’s an enthusiast about New Mexico! ”

Santos’ eyes became instantly animated with light.

“ It was to welcome the Señor and his uncle to New Mexico, the land of the illustrious Conquistadores, of the Santos, that I have the pleasure to introduce myself.” He waved his hand majestically, as if to imply that the great Southwest was theirs and they might freely enter.

Winthrop’s aversion to the man began to give way to a mild interest. “ Suppose we go and look up my uncle,” he said more cordially. “ He and

Mrs. Eastcott will be taking coffee just now somewhere about the hotel."

But Señor Santos stepped forward quickly, almost as if to intercept him. "Ah, pardon, Señor. I forgot—the Señora will be fatigued. She will prefer to be alone this evening. Besides, it is with you I would have the pleasure to speak. I have much to say, Mr. Hammond—much!"

The man spoke with an unexpected firmness in spite of his air of jaunty self-assurance.

"Then to-morrow!" insisted Winthrop politely. "I will tell my uncle and aunt of your call."

"You do me much honor, Mr. Hammond—much honor," said the Mexican, resuming his seat and lighting another cigarette.

"We are all mightily interested in New Mexico—its scenery and its people."

Santos bowed. "We are a very interesting people, Mr. Hammond—very. You flatter us—but—but—you will not like us."

"Not like you?" queried Winthrop, surprised by something almost sinister in the man's tones.

"No, Señor—no! It is for that I do myself the pleasure to make the acquaintance of Señor Hammond. We are interesting, but we are very—what you call it—un-American!"

"You mean that you New Mexicans are not content to be under the flag of the United States?"

"Ah! I see I do not explain myself truly. But New Mexico is another world. The Americans do not know it—they do not sympathize

with it. They despise us—us, the proud hidalgos! ” The words fell with a hiss. Santos half rose in his seat, his sensitive nostrils dilated. Then, drawing his chair closer to the other, he sank his voice. “ New Mexico is dangerous for the Americano! I have said it! ”

He leaned back, looking at his interlocutor squarely to see the effect of his startling communication. Blank amazement was depicted on the American’s face.

“ It is for that I did not wish to have the honor of meeting the Señora this evening,” continued the Mexican. “ But *mañana—mañana—* you will tell her, will you not?—you will say that I, Santos, who know my country, have said it? Then she will turn back—you will turn back—or go to California by some other way. Is it not so? ”

The suddenness with which Winthrop met the warning must have startled the Mexican.

“ There’s no changing our programme once it is fixed,” he replied. “ There’s no turning back and the Middle West route’s out of the question. You can take that from me, right now, Mr. Santos—thanks all the same! ”

To Winthrop’s amazement Santos seized his hand enthusiastically.

“ I knew it, Señor—I knew it! The Americanos know no fear! Ah, I admire you! ” He drew a long breath as of relief and seemed to meditate for a moment. “ I have the idea! You shall tell the Señora everything—everything.

You shall say: 'Have no fear, for Emilio Santos will always protect the Señora and her friends!' You understand, Señor Hammond? "

"I do and I don't," said Winthrop nonchalantly. "We have our guns, and fancy we can render a good account of ourselves if necessary."

"Guns, Señor? " The Mexican threw his cigarette into the fireplace as if to emphasize the absurdity of the remark. "It is not of guns that I speak, but of spirit—the spirit of the people, which smolders, ever ready to break into flame. Against the spirit your guns are of no avail. Listen, Señor, the New Mexicans are proud and do not love their task masters. They dream of the past—the Great Past, which the Americanos think is a dead memory. But not so, not so! It burns like living flame in our breasts to-day. New Mexico sleeps. She shows no sign—but neither does the volcano." His eyes flashed beneath the half-closed lids.

"I don't see, then, Mr. Santos, how you are going to do much in the way of protection for us. You would be as helpless against this spirit as our guns would be, unless——" He looked steadily at the Mexican before venturing to continue—"unless you are in sympathy with that spirit, eh? "

For a moment a curiously baffled look came into the other's dark eyes. Then Santos laughed softly. "I said I was also an American, Señor. Bah! For me that Past is buried—it is finished! But you shall see for yourself. You shall come

to my great rancho. I will protect you—I, Santos, who am, as your poet says, ‘the lord of all I survey.’ You shall see that which has never entered into your dreams. You shall see a rancho so vast that my cattle and my sheep roam over half the world. You shall see a Mexican who is rich as kings and princes. The Americanos of the cities, they must tell it to the newspapers that they have money, before the people will believe. But we—the Mexicans—we are the Lords of Great Estates. Our cattle feed upon the land which would make a thousand of your cities. And our people—they live and breathe but to serve the noble baron. It is just! It is as the Spaniards have ever lived.”

He paused as if to let the words sink deeply into the consciousness of his companion; then, throwing himself back in the chair and drawing a long breath, he continued more calmly. “Listen, Señor! Shall I describe to you that world which you shall enter?”

Winthrop nodded. The man’s eyes had a strange, compelling power.

“My father was a son of noble Castilian lineage, with the blood of Coronado coursing in his veins. He was of a great generation, and his class shall be seen no more now that the Americano has come from the East to make his home on the soil that Spain won with her blood. My father was wealthy beyond all compare, a baron of feudal splendor. He had an army of men upon his immense estate. They were native

Mexicans—peons—his thralls. But he was not a hard governor and his people loved him as their friend and adviser. My father's ranch-house was a stone and adobe palace in which he held his court. He kept open house and received his friends or transacted business with his vassals. I was a little child—yes! I remember the great hall filled for high carnival. The people were carousing or sleeping on the floor. The mighty men of the Ute Nation or of the Navajos were there rolled up in their blankets after a day of hunting in the mountain. And I would look and look—when the great room was lighted only by the crackling logs, and the blaze roared up the huge throats of the fireplaces. Ah, the good days, when Indian and Pale-face sat down in peace! The old chiefs sunning themselves on the verandas—the bucks staring with covetousness upon the sleek-skinned colts that sported in the corrals—the squaws, fascinated by the ribbons and the glittering beads of the Mexican women-servants! My father made all welcome, until they fattened in idleness on his prodigal bounty from year to year—Indians, Mexicans, half-breeds. For also, he had vast kitchens and dining-rooms like a prince—the great Don! His table service was of silver. He had always thirty guests to sit at his 'mesa.' Ah, Señor, was not this house an oasis in the desert? Was it not fortunate that it stood at the foot of the mountain near the Trail where the coaches rolled by? There were then no bridges over the streams; how would the travelers have

held out had it not been the asylum from the storm and flood, for the White and the Red Man alike?

“ But that is not all! I shall tell you—— My father had thousands of horses, fifty thousand cattle, and his sheep were countless as stars. When he went forth to view this world that he owned, he traveled in his coach, drawn by six horses. He dashed through the streams and over the ditches and stones with the daring of a true Santos. Everyone admired him. Everyone loved him—for he was one of the great men who had made New Mexico.

“ And this, Señor Hammond, was my inheritance—mine, mine! The power that my father had is mine also, as you shall see. I have but to command—hundreds shall obey my finger.” He rose from his seat with a proud gesture. “ What is mine shall be yours, Señor, to enjoy! ”

The picture which the Mexican had drawn of his ancestral estate appealed strongly to the sense of the picturesque in his listener. There was something not only in the manner of the recital itself, but also in the unnatural association of this romantic and picturesque personage with the crude, prosaic, every-day life of Chicago which touched Winthrop with its bizarre incongruity. What “ copy ” he would make! What fine promise was he of adventure to come!

“ Thanks—a thousand thanks! ” The American spoke with an air of cordiality. “ Your place

certainly must be very fine. But you must describe it to Mr. Eastcott. The fact is, however, we have a previous invitation, and——”

Winthrop broke off abruptly. In the interest and novelty of Santos’ conversation, he had for the time forgotten Evelyn Deering. With a painful rush came back the memory of her broken promise—her strange disappearance from Chicago. His heart sank heavily.

Santos observed the sudden change in the American’s face, and his own animated expression clouded. He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

“Then you decline, Señor?”

“On the contrary, I shall be delighted to accept, if we do not go to the—the Deering ranch——”

“Ah! The Deering Ranch!” exclaimed Santos.

“Yes. You know Colonel Deering?”

Santos took several paces backward as if to get a better view of his interlocutor. His face beamed with undisguised delight.

“Do I know Colonel Deering? Ah! Everyone in New Mexico and Arizona knows Emilio Santos.” He drew himself up proudly on his tip-toes at his declaration of the somewhat mixed honor, and Winthrop could not restrain a smile.

“Ah! Colonel Deering!” repeated Santos.

“And his charming daughter! Ah!” He blew a kiss from his fingertips with airy familiarity, and sighed audibly. “The lovely Señorita!”

Winthrop was conscious of a jealous twinge. "You know Miss Deering also?" he said with more than a suggestion of feeling.

"You are right, Señor Hammond. It is with pleasure I tell you that, for no man knows the charms of the lovely Señorita as well as I." He sighed again. "I see now her wonderful eyes—hazel—brown, I think you say. They are the color of the buttes veiled in the mist of the setting sun. Ah, I know her!"

Winthrop was in no mood to enjoy the braggadocio spirit of the Mexican, but self-interest counseled him to temporize in order to secure the information he desired.

"Then you have seen Miss Deering lately?" he asked with a ring of sarcasm in his voice.

Santos shrugged his shoulders noncommittally. "Ah! What would you, Señor? A gentleman talk of his rendezvous?" He paused, then laid his hand on the other's arm. "But I will tell *you*, Señor. I have seen her."

Winthrop's spirit writhed. "Thanks," he said coldly. "May I ask where you saw Colonel Deering and his daughter?"

A supercilious smile flitted over the Mexican's features. For an instant Winthrop thought he detected a look of malicious triumph. But the mask of politeness was down again instantly.

"Here, Señor—here." Santos waved his hand comprehensively. "Have they not dined with me? Are there not theaters, Señor?" As Winthrop rose with a frown of annoyance, the Mexi-

can's white teeth gleamed again in a quickly suppressed smile.

"Then perhaps you know where they are?" asked the American quickly. "We had half expected to meet——"

Santos raised his eyebrows politely. "Ah! But they did not know you were coming, Señor! Is it not so? They did not speak of you. It is droll! They were all for the rancho."

"You mean they have gone home?"

"Yes! It was the rancho where they would arrive. You have a swift car, Señor. You will not allow yourself to be left behind?"

Winthrop bowed stiffly, and took up his hat as if to end the interview.

"We don't alter our plans. Good-night, Mr. Santos."

"Hold, Señor!" said Santos, confidently tapping the other's arm. "The Americano is too cold! You have not the Mexican's blood in your veins, and she—ah, she loves the Spanish fire! I know it! I have seen her tremble with emotions that you know not. Follow, Señor; follow swiftly! It is my advice." He paused, and then added, bowing low, "The hour is late! I go! Till to-morrow, Señor!"

Winthrop stared after him in resentful astonishment. "You confounded puppy!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Loves your Spanish fire, does she? I know better!" He followed with knitted eyebrows the man's retreating form.

Suddenly he saw the square ~~shoulder~~ ^{of the} stolid

figure of McNulty enter the hotel. The chauffeur was evidently coming to get his instructions for the next day.

Santos, sauntering along the hallway, met the chauffeur abruptly.

Both men paused.

Then Winthrop saw Santos snap his fingers lightly in McNulty's face.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Winthrop fell asleep just before dawn, his slumber was no more peaceful than had been the hours of tossing and turning on a tormented pillow. In fitful dreams he saw Emilio Santos hurrying across the prairie after Evelyn. A flaming torch was in his hand. He overtook her. He presented the blazing token. Winthrop woke, bathed in perspiration, as she hesitated before the Mexican's gift.

When he dreamed again it was of Evelyn and himself. She clung to him with protestations of longing and of love. He bent his lips to hers, and lo, she was transformed into a vision of McNulty—McNulty, in a Sahara of sand and sun—McNulty, Sphinx-like before a blood-red banner which bore the word: "Beware!" in immense letters of ice!

"Why did he snap his fingers? Tell me! Quick, McNulty!"

The Sphinx made no reply.

"He called upon me! Who is he?"

The lips moved slowly. "Señor Santos!"

"The man you pointed out in the street?"

"Yes!"

"You know him—had seen him before?"

"In Chicago—New Mexico!"

“ You never said you had been in New Mexico! ”

The Sphinx-like figure was silent.

“ Speak, McNulty! Lord, man, have you no tongue? ”

There was no answer.

The blood-red banner, caught by a sudden gust of hot, sand-laden wind, flung itself wide before his tortured eyes. The stone paw of the Sphinx rose slowly and pointed at the word, “ Beware! ”

A wild alarm seized the sleeper.

“ Speak! ” he cried, and with the cry awoke.

The room was light, but cold. The newly risen sun, which had tinted the sky beyond the window with rose and gold, was yet too drowsy to force its beams through the casements of the earth-men. Winthrop, still quivering with the inexplicable, unreasoning dread of his dream, strove to collect his thoughts and separate fancy from reality.

Santos' visit, his information concerning the Deerings' whereabouts, his strange encounter with the chauffeur, admitted of no question. But McNulty's warning? The blood-red banner was but a figment of dreams.

Winthrop turned on his pillow and closed his eyes.

Suddenly McNulty's face rose before him. It was flushed, yet curiously unmoved, but its eyes repeated the message of the scarlet banner.

Winthrop started up. Now he remembered! Thus had McNulty looked when questioned the evening before. The chauffeur, hastily cornered

after Santos' departure, had answered stolidly the hot interrogations. The dream, then, had been true!

But there was more! McNulty had volunteered an astonishing remark: "Beg your pardon, Mr. Hammond! Don't trust that Mexican fellow! Whatever he says to you, don't believe him!"

"What do you mean?" Winthrop recalled his own sharp retort. "What game can he have that you know and I do not?"

McNulty had shaken his head noncommittally. With sudden exasperation Winthrop had caught his arm.

"The Devil! What do you mean with all this confounded mystery? Why should he fool me? Why shouldn't I trust him? Lord, McNulty, haven't you any tongue?"

Ah, then the dream was fact—symbolized, but none the less real! McNulty had warned him—of what? Winthrop did not know. Of whom? A total stranger who had made a friendly call, and brought him the only information obtainable about the girl he loved. He forgot his involuntary dislike for Santos, the reserve which distrusted the fervor of the Mexican. He balanced the chauffeur's mysterious caution against a lover's impatience and—fell asleep.

With the sunlight streaming upon his face through the open window, Winthrop roused himself again. At first he was conscious only of weariness of mind and body. Then, in the calm, clear light of day, came remembrance and the old

anxious questioning. Who was Santos? What did McNulty mean?

The hour was late. Dressing hastily, the young man sought his aunt and uncle in their sitting-room. Mrs. Eastcott glanced at him with sympathetic concern.

“ Heard anything yet about your friends? ” Eastcott, lacking a woman’s sensitiveness to the sufferings of youthful love, greeted his nephew quizzically.

“ Yes, ” said Winthrop without emotion. “ They’ve gone home! ”

He settled himself in an easy chair and recited the story of Santos’ call. The Mexican’s identity with the man indicated by McNulty in the street, the invitation to visit his ranch, and his desire to make the acquaintance of the “ charming Señora, ” were details carefully omitted. But the man’s appearance, his flowery speech and manner, together with his acquaintance with the Deerings and his statement that they had departed for New Mexico, were all duly emphasized. Santos’ remarks concerning the dangers of the Southwest brought forth immediate and unconcealed contempt from Eastcott.

“ Rubbish! ” he said decidedly. “ There’s no more danger in a trip through New Mexico to-day than there is through Ohio. The man is a neurotic, Win, or else he has colored all New Mexico to his own views. He may hate the ‘ Americanos, ’ but I’ll wager his comrades do not! ”

Mrs. Eastcott, putting a stitch in her husband’s

driving glove, looked up with well considered cheerfulness.

“Of course not,” she said, with the faintest tremble in her voice. “New Mexico has been civilized for ages now. There’s—there’s not the least possible danger. I am sure we shall—er—shall thoroughly enjoy Mr. Santos’ country!”

“And he says the Deerings left for their ranch? Strange! There must be a big misunderstanding somewhere!”

“But isn’t it glorious you’ve found them!” exclaimed Mrs. Eastcott, with characteristic optimism.

“We’ve got to catch them first—hold them up somewhere!” said Winthrop, brightening slightly. “Have you any objection, Uncle, to—er—getting off at once?”

Eastcott considered. “No,” he said jovially. “It’ll be an adventure; though it sounds like a wild-goose chase. Still, we’re ‘Knight errants,’ anyway!”

Mrs. Eastcott regarded her nephew more doubtfully. “There’s a great deal to do here in Chicago. How can we leave immediately? Then there’s the luncheon at the Auto Club, John.”

“I’d forgotten the luncheon,” said her husband. “But that will be over by three o’clock, and——” He looked at his wife. “What’s wrong with our getting off at half-past? Stay a day or two longer, Nell, if you like, to get that shopping done. Win and I can make a good run before turning in somewhere along the line, and you can overtake

us by train. There's the wonderful River-to-River Road ahead of us—something like 400 miles long. I'm keen to give it a trial!" And rising briskly, Eastcott began to collect the route books from the table.

"Never!" exclaimed Mrs. Eastcott with emphasis. "I'd rather let my shopping wait till I get to New Mexico than be left behind!"

"Good! Coyote skins off the bargain counter in Santa Fé, eh?" said Eastcott, folding a large map.

"Or Navajo blankets and Apache arrowheads at Albuquerque?" put in Winthrop with returning gayety. "A few antiques in the shape of sixteenth century Spanish scalps might be useful as parlor decorations."

But Mrs. Eastcott had discreetly ended the badinage by hasty flight.

"Knight errants in Chicago!" thought Winthrop, as he strolled through the crowded streets. It was Evelyn's metaphor as well as his uncle's. Sir Galahad and Launcelot in the heart of pork-packerdom! In quest of what Grail? Actuated by what spirit and what ideals? What ideal could a man have in a smoke covered city where he must couch his lance in a noisy thoroughfare, stable his horse in a garage, and lodge in no more romantic castle than "Room 1201" at the top of a twentieth century caravanserai? The Indians of old had peopled this region of Chekagua—the God of the Thunder—with spirits which haunted the river and bewitched the oozy swamp of long ago. The

White Man's imagination seemed to lag where the Red Man's mind had risen above the raw materialism of life.

Yet that little hut of the pioneer—the priestly figure of Marquette, reposing by the door, shooting, for the necessities of a precarious life, the deer and buffalo—did not these constitute a wild romance no less poetic than the magic of the Indian? Did not the Pale-faces who spoke the Frenchman's tongue and bore the banner of the Christian faith—did not Joliet and his followers, discovering that superlatively important portage of the Des Plaines River, people the wilderness with dreams and visions of the future? What was Chicago but the tangible expression of those dreams? With Marquette's little hut, the metropolis by the lake had made its bow to the world—picturesque example of that indomitable Will that conquered the wilderness and preserves the greatness of America.

The road which Eastcott followed from Chicago runs southward through La Grange and out into the open country. The voices of Marquette, Joliet, and La Salle still echo in the singing waters of the Illinois; memories of the Iliad days of Fort Crève Cœur of the French Colony—the ghost of Hennepin, the priest—the breath of the primeval forests—linger yet in the beautiful Fox Valley and in the fertile plains beyond. Held poised by some magic power, huge waves of soil, raised in mighty sweeps of green-crested earth, billow to the horizon line. Towns and villages

float, ark-like, on a brown sea which rolls majestically onward, toward the Mississippi and the great mysterious West.

Beyond the wonderful bridge of Modjeska's nephew, which spans the Father of Waters, rises the towering cliff of the Sachem Black Hawk, and it was here, at Davenport, that a picturesque type of humanity, long-legged, long-whiskered, clean-cut, and shrewd, clambered into the Eastcott automobile.

"I'm to start you folks on the new River Road to the Missouri," the visitor explained amiably. "Not that you want any guide with all them telegraph poles, and the streak of white paint on 'em at every turn and twist. We're so mighty proud of that pike that we want you Easterners to forget there wasn't a word in the dictionary bad enough for it two years ago. What's that, sir? You're right; there wasn't no bottom to any Iowa road one time. But roads are the most discontented things in creation, when once they get sight of a city or an auto-*mo*-bile. They want to be all furbished up and put on their Sunday clothes. An' this pike ain't no exception. You see, the noospapers had kind'er risen up about the 'gumbo' mud, and that made the farmers all along the line get pretty hot under the collar. So they got to holdin' meetin's, and one fine mornin' they set to work with a referee feller from the city a-holdin' his stop watch. Then they began a-gradin' and drainin' an' pattin' and coaxin'; raisin' it here an' droppin' it thar, till there wasn't

a wrinkle on that old pike's face nowhere. Then they fetched a lot of King drags, an' they scraped and curry-combed an' scratched an' dry shampooed that critter—working like niggers for fifty cents every mile scraped—and when they'd got through, an' that pike had come to its senses—why, thar wasn't a citizen or a jack rabbit as didn't reckon he'd got twisted in his geography."

The automobile was spinning smoothly along through a rolling landscape, decked with autumn flowers, where occasionally great level expanses stretched away beyond the range of human vision.

"What I like about these new-fangled contraptions on rubber," the pilot remarked genially, "is the way they lick up these plains." He waved his hand to the prairies and to the timber groves which dotted the landscape like islands in a greenish-brown sea. "You've got to strike the trail week after week in a prairie schooner to kind'er feel that there ain't nothing on God's earth but distance and Indians and shootin' and thirst, and only the onreachable at the end!" He paused, as if mentally whittling his thoughts. "Men are afraid of the prairie and build cities to sort'er shut it out. But I reckon you can't give the automobile too much of it."

There were sufficient temptations between Davenport and Omaha to induce the party to make the run by easy stages. Amana and Homestead, the idyllic settlements of a sect who till the earth while they dream of a warless world,—Colfax, modestly masquerading as the Carlsbad

of America,—Des Moines, where the Pilot-Sage of Iowa handed the party over to the care of those citizens who had initiated an American highway almost long enough to link London with Edinburgh—all these exerted a charm not to be resisted or denied. On the map the cities of the three days' journey were as close as peas in their pod; actually they were so far apart that, compared with an English map on the same scale, Eastcott's route chart would have looked like a pictured desert.

The fair skies and the smooth surfaces of the River-to-River Road ended at Omaha. Along the valley of the Missouri and beyond the Platte River, clouds lowered and the roads deteriorated. All that day and the next morning showers spilled themselves liberally at frequent intervals, warning the automobile to caution and reduced speed. If Winthrop chafed inwardly he preserved a calm exterior. Eastcott, full of the spirit of pursuit, lamented the enforced delay more than he.

The way jogged and zig-zagged over graded, natural highways to Nebraska City, and the clouds increased in density and blackness. The road was rough, and deep ruts necessitated the most careful driving and an irritating moderation of the pace.

“We'd better make a rush for Falls City,” said Eastcott, as the car approached the shining rails of the line which links Omaha with Kansas City, and along which a train was rapidly approaching across the plains from the North. “We're want-

ing more gasoline, and shelter won't come amiss! "

The sentence was answered by a vivid flash of lightning, and the rattle of hailstones sounded abruptly on the leather top of the car. As the great engine rushed past, the clanging of the bell mingled ominously with the roar of the train and the clatter of the glittering stones.

Winthrop, who had hastily left his seat to help McNulty adjust the leather side-curtains, sprang to the running board of the automobile as the train thundered by.

Suddenly he gave a cry.

Against the brass rail of the observation platform, protected from the storm by the overhanging canopy, stood two figures. A man puffed lazily at a cigarette. A woman at his side suddenly lifted a handkerchief and waved it to the travelers.

"Who in thunder——?" exclaimed Eastcott, above the noise of the receding train and of the hailstones, which hammered with gnome-like viciousness on road and automobile.

Winthrop—white, dumfounded—stared blankly at the disappearing train.

The events of the next few moments were a hopelessly blurred image. He must have exclaimed—have called aloud the names—and that, too, in a tone which startled his companions, for they turned suddenly in his direction. Mechanically he took his seat again. He was conscious that the roar of the storm suddenly ceased. A man's voice broke into a laugh. Someone ad-

dressed him. He felt the forward spring of the car and heard its cat-like purr as it shot across the metal rails. Out of the chaos of his emotions arose a blind, insensate hate of the Thing that had gone roaring and rumbling past. He strained his eyes feverishly into the distance. Far to the south the train was snaking its way toward the dimness of the horizon, but the penetrating hoot of its whistle still sounded a faint note of defiance in his ears, and its bell rang in his memory like a knell. He felt a sudden, wild desire to throttle somebody—to strike out murderously. His fingers ached to grasp the Mexican's throat. He was seething with a rage whose bitterness he made no effort to suppress. Emilio Santos!—Evelyn! Traveling together!

For hours Winthrop saw only Evelyn Deering and Emilio Santos—Evelyn Deering, who had promised to meet him and failed to keep her word—Evelyn Deering, who traveled alone with Señor Santos and—smiled. They loved one another! He repeated the phrase jealously over and over to himself until it seared his very soul. Then as if to add to the bitterness of his cup, there came to him the words of the Mexican at the hotel. He saw Santos standing in dandified, insolent assurance, flaunting a knowledge of Evelyn's moods and preferences, and urging him to follow into the West. Evelyn had not gone West. The fellow had had a purpose in concealing her actual whereabouts, and he himself, by falling into Santos' trap, had done his best to help it along. Now

that purpose stood revealed. Santos and Evelyn were—eloping sweethearts? Or were they indeed already wed and embarked upon their honeymoon?

Bitterly he reproached himself for his supineness—the smug assumption of a leisurely and easy conquest. Another had supplanted him—a bolder and a better lover than he—one more determined to win the object of his desire. Here, then, was the reason for the silence of the Deerings and for their absence from Chicago.

Winthrop closed his eyes to gain some mental relief. But a woman waved a handkerchief, beckoning him, taunting him, while a man stood by her side with a laugh upon his handsome, treacherous lips. The vision maddened him, and he opened his eyes in a vain endeavor to fix his attention on externalities. But his jealous bitterness left him no peace. Evelyn was lost to him! He had been a fool, and he was reaping the fool's empty reward. McNulty had warned him; was it of this? Had the chauffeur some strange prescience or actual knowledge of Santos' relation to Evelyn? Yet the man had shown no interest as the observation car passed. Who was Santos? Who was McNulty?

As the automobile rapidly approached Falls City, the conversation of his companions cut into the unhappy lover's thoughts like a dull-edged sword.

“There's a garage somewhere, I suppose,” remarked Eastcott. “Better make for that,

McNulty, at once. We can't afford to take any chances on our fuel."

"We sure can't!" said the chauffeur grimly.

The storm had given place to a pale sunlight that coldly illuminated the landscape and lay in long, faint rays across the road ahead. The scene was chill and uninviting. Even Mrs. Eastcott, always eager for the objects of the wayside, showed no enthusiasm, and Winthrop stared dully before him as if he had adopted McNulty's earlier, immovable remoteness.

One—two—three! The signal blasts of McNulty's horn caused the leisurely citizens of Falls City to look up at the mud-covered car. Those who recognized it as a "long distance" automobile stared or nodded a welcome. As it approached the garage, elbowing a large touring car for room at the curb, a strange chauffeur, blinking out of small, gray eyes, half shut with drowsiness, roused to an amount of curiosity rather alarming in so somnolent a creature.

"Reckon ye're the folks as is hiking across the Continent from New York?"

Eastcott answered in the affirmative.

"Guess yer don't know as there's a bunch in there waiting to clap eyes on yer?"

"Is that so? Fresh pilots from Kansas City, perhaps?" Eastcott groaned inwardly as he spoke.

"You've got me guessing," said the man, scratching his head lazily. "But they're going to chase yer all right in this here auto."

With that the Man of Information settled back comfortably into his cradle-like driving seat.

Eastcott sprang down, his curiosity aroused, and assisted his wife to alight. She held out her hand to Winthrop sympathetically. But her nephew was in no frame of mind for deputations or condolence, and as the others disappeared into the garage he crossed the street to an open space where grass and trees offered temporary refuge. His bruised spirit yearned for solitude, and like an injured animal he would have crawled away to nurse his pain in secret. He was sick with a sense of the futility of his quest; an unutterable disgust with himself and the world swept over him.

As he trod the sward of the tree-shaded "square," he was conscious of a woman's figure which appeared suddenly ahead of him. He glanced at it indifferently. Then he looked again with quick attention.

Evelyn Deering stood before him.

CHAPTER VI

WITH a little cry of delight Evelyn hurried toward Winthrop, who stood still as if paralyzed by his surprise.

Even in this first moment of astonishment, the lover realized that the last few months had increased and matured her beauty. He noted the fine poise of her figure, the fuller womanhood betrayed in the graceful lines. The closeness of her traveling suit revealed new curves, while from beneath the white lace veil, tossed back over her hat brim and falling in floating ends to her shoulders, her face showed tantalizingly its perfect oval. The dark eyes, which shone with a welcoming light, were deeper and more tender than of old. The delicate cheeks wore a rosier bloom. Instinctively Winthrop was aware that some experience, some new sympathy or vitalizing emotion, had transformed the girl into a woman. It was as if, in secret, a soul had grown and strengthened, to outwardly reveal its change in fuller proportions and more radiant coloring.

Evelyn was smiling and holding out her hand with every sign of eagerness.

“ Mr. Hammond! You here—so soon? ” Her voice had a richer, fuller note than any he remembered, and she seemed infinitely more to be

desired than the girl of his summer dreams. Was it his love or his jealousy that was responsible for her added grace and charm?

His admiration and resentment were strangely mingled with a bitterness that he could not conceal, and he stared at her, unconscious, until he felt her friendly pressure, that he had put out a responsive hand. "Oh!" he exclaimed. "Miss ——" He hesitated awkwardly.

"We were going back to meet you by automobile," she explained eagerly. "We have been hurrying from Chicago to catch up with you at Kansas City. You saw us pass you, of course? We left the train at the first possible station. We never thought you could come so far as this so soon."

Winthrop bowed formally. "Most kind, I'm sure, of you and Mr.——" He hesitated again; the name stuck in his throat. "Most kind. My uncle and aunt will be delighted to meet you."

There was no cordiality in his tone, and he wondered at the formal words. To speak thus to the woman who, for so many months, had been the inspiration of his hopes and dreams! What had happened to him and to her? His lips moved involuntarily to recall his stilted phrases. He would have given worlds to appear before her self-contained and debonair. He was bitterly humiliated that he could not conceal his resentment at the trick Fate had played him.

"And I am almost ashamed to meet them! What must you all think of us for deserting

Chicago just as you reached it?" she exclaimed with sincere apology in her voice. "You must let me explain at once!"

"Won't you sit down?" Winthrop made an effort to recover himself.

As he followed her to a bench in the sunshine, he noted again the changes the months had made and her added grace and charm. In her movements there was reflected a buoyancy of spirit that irritated him. Was she, then—this woman who had failed him—entirely callous to his ill-concealed emotion? Better her open resentment of his manner than this show of indifferent self-possession!

With a gracious little gesture, Evelyn waved him to a place beside her on the bench. He disregarded her invitation, and she looked at him questioningly. When she spoke again her voice had lost something of its spontaneity. He knew that at last she had felt his coldness.

"You had my letter, of course, Mr. Hammond?" He nodded. "We didn't understand that you were coming to Chicago so soon! You said your plans were changed."

He was standing over her, his eyes searching hers intently. As he looked up she was conscious of something in their gaze that disconcerted her. Could it be a doubt, she thought, a hesitancy to accept her explanation? Or was he seriously offended by the apparent slight of her broken promise? Her voice faltered, and her glance fell, but she went on bravely.

“ We were only a few miles out of Chicago, visiting some friends until you should arrive. But we did not see the papers until the news of your coming was ancient history. Then we hurried back at once, but you were gone! If the hotel clerk had not had the address at Kansas City I don't know what we should have done. And we had been counting on seeing you and Mr. Eastcott fêted at Chicago! You spoiled everything, Sir Knight, by rushing off and—Oh dear, I've had no chance to polish your shield! ” She laughed with a spirited uplift of her head and the archness that in former days had unconsciously cast so effectual a spell over the man before her. Had the spell renewed its power? Winthrop bent suddenly towards her.

“ Miss Deering, there has been some misunderstanding, some mistake. Forgive me—but I want to know the truth. ”

She rose with surprised dignity. Her beauty had never been so compelling, so alluring. His hands clinched with suppressed emotion.

“ Mr. Hammond, it is I who do not understand. What do you mean? ”

Suddenly Winthrop's expression changed. He frowned heavily. His face became livid. In an angle of a building some hundred yards behind Evelyn, a man's figure emerged. Emilio Santos, smoking a cigarette, sauntered forth into the sunlight.

Winthrop stared, motionless, transfixed. A sudden wave of jealous hatred and despair swept

over him. "There's the man!" McNulty's words at Chicago recurred to him with sinister significance. He looked again at Evelyn, and his eyes caught hers and held them for a moment that was an eternity.

"What have you done? What have I lost? Oh, Evelyn!" The words came hotly, in a suppressed voice full of passionate despair.

"Hammond! By Jove, I'm glad to see you." There was a resounding slap on the young man's shoulder. "We thought we had lost you. What do you mean by giving us the slip, sir?"

Winthrop staggered back. The color came into his face with a rush, as his hand was seized in the vise-like grasp of a military looking man, who beamed on him with undisguised cordiality and breezy Western heartiness.

"Good Heavens, Colonel Deering! You here?"

"To be sure! You've only to see Evelyn to know I'm not far off. She's the comet—I'm the tail." Colonel Deering laid a friendly hand on the young man's shoulder again. "You're looking all right, my boy! Bully for you! Here, Evelyn, I want to introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Eastcott. Don't trouble yourself, Hammond; we're already acquainted. I saw the car outside the garage with the flags flying, and introduced myself."

In a daze Winthrop watched Evelyn shake hands with his uncle and aunt. She smiled and bowed, but her words came unevenly and her lips

trembled. He knew that his reproach and sudden familiarity of address had stirred her, and, with a rapid revulsion of feeling, he was glad that he had hurt her.

The Eastcotts greeted the girl with enthusiasm. Winthrop saw their pleasure, noting, with a strange, jealous pride, their interest in Evelyn, and feeling instinctively their approval of her beauty. Were they conscious of the tenseness of the situation, he wondered. But Mrs. Eastcott looked toward him with a felicitating smile, and he understood that she at least attributed any embarrassment on his part or the girl's to the interruption of lovers' greetings. At the irony of the thought his lips curled bitterly. Then his eyes came back to the substantial, compact figure before him. Colonel Deering? Here with Evelyn and Santos—the eloping lovers?

“You're a pretty chap—sending us a telegram and then running off before we could get back to the city. You fooled us in fine style.” The Colonel's brisk, good-natured voice broke in upon his confused thoughts with the freshness of an ocean breeze.

“Telegram?” Winthrop caught at the word blankly. “Fooled you? I don't understand.”

“No use to play 'possum, sir,” said the Colonel gayly. “You can't pretend that that message was a slip of the pen, even if you are a journalist.” And he tapped the other lightly on the arm.

“But I didn't send any telegram, Colonel,”

protested Winthrop. "You must have been misinformed."

"Misinformed, eh?" exclaimed the older man with good-natured incredulity. "Evelyn, do you hear? Hammond says that telegram of his dropped out of the skies."

Evelyn, who had been talking with Mrs. Eastcott, looked up in surprise, but her eyes avoided Winthrop's. Before she could reply, Eastcott broke in jovially.

"Ah, ha! Private telegram!" he exclaimed, laughing. A dawning light spread over his face. "Ho! Ho! Made a mistake in your schedule and bungled dates! A nice Press Agent you are, Win! What will Knight say to that part of the job?"

Winthrop looked from one man to the other with a dazed, puzzled expression. Were the Fates combining to make further sport of him, and mercilessly peppering him with their shafts? "But I sent no telegram," he repeated stubbornly.

"Ah! Here you are, Señor Santos!" Colonel Deering's voice interrupted cordially. "Our friends have already arrived, you see. Let me introduce you! Mr. and Mrs. Eastcott, Mr. Hammond—Señor Santos."

Emilio Santos strode forward with perfect self-possession. He was to-day more obviously the Southwestern ranchman than he had appeared in the close-fitting garb of evening dress in the Chicago hotel. He raised his sombrero with a broad, sweeping gesture, and bowed low over Mrs. East-

cott's gloved hand, imprinting the lightest of kisses on the dainty finger-tips. "Ah! Señora, my devotions to you—Señor, this is my great pleasure."

He turned to Winthrop. For the hundredth part of a second, both men regarded each other in silence. Then Santos bowed again formally. Winthrop nodded curtly and turned away. Neither had betrayed the slightest sign of recognition.

The Deerings, who had no idea that Santos had a previous acquaintanceship with any member of the party, hardly noticed the slight pause that followed the introduction. But to Winthrop it was fraught with disconcerting significance. He knew that his uncle and aunt regarded the Mexican and himself with astonishment, and for a moment he thought that Eastcott would blurt out some remark that must reveal the fact of Santos' call in Chicago. Then he saw his aunt lift her eyebrows ever so slightly, and he understood that she, with a woman's quickness, had accepted the situation and had thus warned her husband against any exclamation of surprise. She would loyally follow his own cue of silence.

Winthrop had been as unprepared as she for Santos' slight. Suddenly he was filled with a wild impulse to proclaim to the Deerings his previous acquaintance with their friend, and to charge the Mexican, before the entire party, with duplicity and deception. Then the words of the introduction recurred to him. "Señor Santos!"

Colonel Deering had not introduced the newcomer as his son-in-law. Was this another trick of the mocking Arbiters of Destiny?

He felt a choking sensation at his throat. Was he, after all, mistaken? Was Evelyn—Evelyn Deering still?

The girl stood beside Mrs. Eastcott, a picture of glorious young womanhood. She was talking lightly, as if she enjoyed herself and her companions. An air of natural distinction pervaded her—a distinction compounded of sensitiveness and spirit, gentleness and refinement. He felt that his questioning and doubts had set him worlds apart from her, and, with this mad ecstasy of reawakened hope half smothering him, now longed to go to her—to end his self-imposed banishment.

“We’ll hit the Trail to Kansas City together,” announced Colonel Deering triumphantly. “I’ve hired that automobile outside the garage there, and if we can’t turn it northward to meet you, we’ll head it south behind you, though I think lunch beforehand at the hotel nearby might be in order.”

Winthrop’s heart was beating tumultuously. He could have shouted with exultation. Evelyn was to be with them. But the only sound that escaped him was an undertone of excitement. “I know it! I know it!” he whispered, and involuntarily struck one hand with his clenched fist.

Half an hour later, the automobiles, restive for the start, were “champing their bits” in front of the hotel, and Winthrop was standing by the

tonneau ready to assist his aunt into her seat. As he gave her his hand, she whispered confidentially, "She's perfectly delightful, Win! I've fallen in love with her myself." Then aloud: "Miss Deering is coming in our car—her father has resigned her to us as far as Kansas City. Isn't that charming? Come, Miss Deering."

But Evelyn hesitated beside her father. "Oh, I can't, Mrs. Eastcott—really. Thank you so much! I'd love to be with you, but I should crowd you. I'll go with father and Señor Santos."

"Not a bit of it," said Eastcott cheerfully. "Plenty of room. Win, pitch that box under my ulster, will you? Nell, hand me the umbrellas, and I'll stow them on the front seat. There! Room enough for a regiment, isn't there, Colonel?"

But still Evelyn lingered. Santos, watching the scene in silence, smiled. Then he bent over the wraps already piled up in the Deering car, and selecting a heavy cloak, brought it to her with the air of a cavalier.

"Permit me, Señorita," he said in a low voice that suggested both intimacy and protection. "You will feel the chill."

She slipped her arms into the wrap gratefully, allowing him to adjust it upon her shoulders. "Thanks, Señor."

Then, since there was no escape, Evelyn drew herself up proudly and gave her hand to Eastcott. Winthrop, who had divined the kindly intent of his aunt's little maneuver, understood that sud-

den, scornful little lift of the girl's head. Evelyn refused to let his presence disturb her.

What a fool he had been! A jealous idiot leaping to hasty conclusions! No wonder she scorned him, and had avoided him at luncheon. He kicked himself mentally, at the same time grinning with irrepressible delight. He was a blundering jack-ass—but Evelyn was not yet Santos' bride!

The expression of the Mexican as the "Señorita" entered the Eastcott automobile was anything but pleasant. He looked after her, biting his mustache and frowning. Punctuating his discomfiture came a sharp blast on the horn, as if the automobile snorted mockingly. McNulty was bending over the rubber bulb, examining it coldly. One might almost have said that he reproved the horn for its sudden demonstration.

As the chauffeur straightened his shoulders again, and gripped the wheel, the Mexican swept off the wide sombrero in a magnificent bow to the ladies, and turned to the second car. He would have passed Winthrop without a glance but that the American, standing aside with exaggerated politeness, swept off his own cap in salute. The action was the first note of defiance and—triumph!

If Winthrop was conscious of one thing more than another, as the two cars drew away from Falls City, it was of Evelyn's nearness, as she sat wedged between himself and Mrs. Eastcott. The closeness of that physical contact set his nerves tingling deliciously and brought him a keen

exhilaration. At the same time he felt the Mexican's eyes glued upon him through the back of the tonneau; he imagined with satisfaction the continued gnawing of that long mustache and the rage burning in the fiery Southern heart. He wondered grimly, for a moment, if Santos was thinking of renewing the invitation to the old Don's famous *rancho*; but, with Evelyn beside him, there was no longer any bitterness in Winthrop's heart, and he turned to her with a smile. For Evelyn Deering was free—free to give herself to whom she pleased. What did it matter if Santos were a rival? What did it matter if the Mexican's infatuation resented any intrusion? Santos must look to his laurels; for Winthrop Hammond still had a chance to win the race for love!

The sun dropped slowly toward the horizon line of the river valley. In the distance, solitary houses and cattle stood out black against the Western sky, while here and there a low ridge to the East marked the course of the broad Missouri. The rolling landscape, which had been dull and drab in the uncompromising light of midday, in the afternoon took on picturesque hues, stolen by some ethereal magic from the palette of the glowing heavens. The far-off line of hills deepened from a misty blue into portentous walls of indigo, while through the low, coarse grasses, streaks of silver or of tawny red marked the sinuous course of streams seaming the arable lands of the settlers. Landscape and road alike

made a picture of rough unfinish and desolation which, as the hours passed and twilight approached, became more and more melancholy and eerie. Occasional stretches of the roadway were now almost primal in their wildness, and in spite of the transforming touch of man and the evidence of his contiguity in road and fence, one might almost feel in these former haunts of the Red Men, the lingering spirit of the Indian and of the limitless plains beyond.

The mystery of the coming twilight and the softening effect upon the bare surroundings, wrought their charm upon the occupants of the Eastcott automobile. As the waning light gradually obliterated the salient objects of the landscape, there were expunged from Winthrop's mind the acute incidents of the meeting at Falls City. Colonel Deering's allusion to a mysterious telegram, that blind insensate jealousy, the perfidy of the Mexican rival—all these were for the time forgotten. Winthrop, who ever since luncheon had refused to be left out of the conversation as emphatically as a short time before he had refused to be included, now became positively joyous. His gayety was in marked contrast to his former manner, and he laughed with a subdued exuberance that was keyed to the hush of the hour.

If Evelyn had been surprised at the unexpected manner of his greeting a few hours previous, there was now no course open to her but that of graciousness. Nevertheless, though she found Mrs. East-

cott too charming and sympathetic an acquaintance to be willing to embarrass her by any further display of coldness toward Winthrop, the girl was not loath to punish him mildly for his rudeness.

“ These last two days have been our worst experience of rough traveling,” said Mrs. Eastcott as the car lurched heavily into a deep rut in the road. “ Really, Miss Deering, I rather shrink from New Mexico—though till now I’ve not confessed it. Do the Mexicans truly make it so dangerous for Americans to travel in their part of the country by automobile? ”

“ Dangerous for Americans? ” repeated Evelyn. “ Certainly not! Father has his own automobile, and so has Señor Santos. Of course there are the discomforts of rough sand trails and the danger of mistaking the way perhaps; but that is all. Where did you hear such uncomplimentary reports? ”

“ Why, Win was told by——” Mrs. Eastcott hesitated and looked at her nephew. Then she finished loyally. “ I heard them in Chicago.”

“ All nonsense, Aunt Nell. You see, Miss Deering corroborates what Uncle John and I said. New Mexico’s as safe as a Fifth Avenue tea-room after the matinée.”

“ Then I know we shall escape only in a mutilated condition! I shall bribe McNulty to puncture the tires at once or to do something to the cylinders, so that we shan’t be able to get away from Kansas City.”

“ Oh, but the ranch, Mrs. Eastcott. We can't let you off from that visit. Truly, you'll love New Mexico. Ask Señor Santos! He knows every inch of it. He'll tell you it's perfectly harmless and altogether charming.”

Winthrop grinned ironically under cover of the shadows.

“ Perhaps he would suggest that the gravest danger, to women at least, lies in the fascinations of the handsome young Mexicans,” ventured his aunt archly.

“ Very probably,” assented Evelyn with disconcerting readiness. “ And the Mexican men certainly are fascinating. Don't you think Señor Santos is delightful, Mrs. Eastcott? ”

Mrs. Eastcott, who would have given a great deal to know the exact nature of Evelyn's evident friendship with Señor Santos, agreed that she did. But privately she reserved to herself the right to change her opinion if the Mexican became more fascinating than her nephew.

“ He is so interesting, so emotional,” said Evelyn with a spontaneous frankness that made her male companion wince. “ I'm so glad you met him, as he will help you to form your first impressions of New Mexico.”

“ I believe this is Lansing,” said Winthrop, looking about him through the gloom. “ We shall be in Kansas City in short order now.”

“ And he has such perfect manners,” continued Evelyn tantalizingly. “ He's so exquisitely considerate, so thoroughly courteous and polite!

I'm sure, Mr. Hammond, you don't often find such courtliness in Eastern men."

"What's that? I beg your pardon, Miss Deering? Eastern manners? Yes, they're certainly delightful. You're quite right there. The East is the place for sincerity and good, solid dependableness every time."

"Well," said Evelyn politely, "I confess that, in spite of four years in an Eastern college, I'm captivated by the Southwest. Señor Santos' family dates back to the days of Cortez, you know."

Winthrop squirmed inwardly. With difficulty he preserved himself from some exclamation which would reveal his scornful rejection of Santos' ancestral claims.

"How delightfully medieval!" said Mrs. Eastcott. "I suppose he has a ranch down there. I believe I heard something to that effect."

"Indeed he has." There was no mistaking the enthusiasm of Evelyn's tone. Her admiration was unfeigned. "He owns the biggest and most picturesque place in New Mexico. I went there once with father. You must not leave New Mexico without a peep at it, Mrs. Eastcott. I shall see that Señor Santos invites you all."

"Thanks," said Winthrop dryly.

"He urged us to take a little trip up to Quebec and along the St. Lawrence when we found that you had left Chicago," explained the girl. "But I am devoted to New Mexico, and I preferred to return at once."

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And with that Winthrop, who had to admit the justice of her shots, was forced to be content until they reached Kansas City, for during the few remaining miles, Evelyn devoted herself to his aunt.

McNulty was now threading his way through the outlying streets of the city until a broad panorama of twinkling lights and shadows spread itself beyond the magnificent viaduct which spans the Kaw River at its confluence with the Missouri. When the city had fairly engulfed the travelers, twilight had almost given place to night, and the smoke of many an ill-smelling packing plant rose weirdly through the gloom—strange reminder of the camp fires of the Kansas or “smoky” Indians who once dwelt on the site of the “Central City.”

Evelyn leaned back in the tonneau with a little sigh—half pity for the evils of the odorous slums, half a sense of her own luxurious comfort and content.

“You are cold?” asked Winthrop anxiously, alert to her slightest movement. He gave the rug a vigorous pull, and looked at her almost tenderly in the shadows.

“No,” she said slowly, the gayety of her voice replaced by a soft seriousness. “No, I am not cold. But I was thinking of my work in neighborhoods something like those we have passed. You must live in a slum ‘settlement,’ to learn to appreciate”—she turned to him with a little wistful smile—“New Mexico.”

Her voice was low and vibrating. He felt a tenderness in its tone that mingled strangely with

a fervor of—what was it—longing for warmth and light or self-sacrifice for the sake of those who were denied such treasures? Winthrop was suddenly and subtly aware of woman's sympathy for suffering, and the misunderstandings and embarrassments of the afternoon were illumined by that flash of the gentle nobility which for many months had been the loadstone of his life.

CHAPTER VII

EVELYN DEERING was on her knees before a trunk. Clothed in a brilliant hued dressing gown which fell back in wide sleeves from her bare arms, her long, brown hair loosened and lying on her shoulders, she dived to her dimpled elbows into a tumbled collection of gowns and millinery. The trunk, hurriedly packed in Chicago, had already disgorged enough of its contents to effectually enliven the drab-colored room of the Kansas City hotel. A row of smart, little boots and slippers stood at the foot of the bed, a soft felt hat, adorned with a flaming silk scarf and a jaunty eagle's feather perched on the top of the mirror; and from the bed a low-cut gown of white chiffon trailed its laces upon the carpet. Evelyn, flushed and disheveled with the dainty untidiness of a woman whose occasional *négligée* is as charming as her accustomed and immaculate trimness, glanced about her perplexedly, questioning the room for the object she had failed to find in the trunk.

But her surroundings betrayed no sign of that for which she was searching, and she returned with determination to the ruthless investigation of the trunk. This time her efforts were rewarded. A small parcel bound with a pink ribbon

came into view. She drew it forth and untied it hastily. A score of letters scattered over the gay silk of her dressing gown and the checkered pattern of the carpet. They were letters written on large sheets in a firm, bold hand.

Evelyn had set out from Chicago full of regret that she had failed to meet Winthrop according to her promise. She had hurried to overtake the automobile, and had greeted him at Falls City, a little confused as to how she could have misunderstood his telegram, but unaffectedly glad to see him. He had not responded to her cordiality, and he had actually seemed to doubt the validity of her explanation. She looked at the letters lying in her lap. How could her devoted correspondent have treated her so rudely?

But as she thought of his drawn, tense face bending towards her and of the passionate fervor with which he had reproached her, her cheeks flushed to a deeper red. Confused as his words had been to her understanding, the depth of his feeling had stirred some strange, inexplicable emotion within her which, for a moment, had set her nerves tingling and her heart throbbing.

She had liked Winthrop so much! She had admired his fresh-heartedness, and a certain vigorous wholesomeness that sat well on his broad shoulders. She had had letters from other men; but his were different. They were less openly flattering, more companionable. She felt, behind the written words, a steadfastness which she valued because it made no protestation of regard.

and desire to please. Between two people of congenial interests and tastes, a friendship, she thought, should take itself for granted. The letters in her lap recognized the mutual attraction simply and cordially.

She turned the pages rapidly, reading eagerly here and there. Every word and phrase that arrested her fleeting glance belied Winthrop's manner at Falls City. He had been cold. He had been passionate. But here there was nothing reflecting either of these moods. The letters were the expression of a totally different personality. The "Mr. Hammond" she knew and liked—the "Mr. Hammond" she understood—— She laid down the letter she was reading. Did she, after all, understand him? Did she like him more, or less, in this new phase? Was——? She hesitated. Was—she really something more to him than she had hitherto divined?

After their arrival in Kansas City she had fancied that he sought some opportunity to speak alone with her; but conversation with the Eastcotts and the presence of Santos had precluded any tête-à-tête during the evening. Since then Winthrop had been busy with his press work. She had spent the morning with Mrs. Eastcott and the Mexican, and at luncheon she had avoided any opening for explanations.

"Yes! Come in, Father!" Evelyn roused herself abruptly from her thoughtful contemplation of Winthrop's letters in answer to a rap and a familiar call.

Colonel Deering half opened the door that led from the hall, and stood in the shadow without speaking. The brilliantly clad figure seated on the floor before the trunk looked up in surprise. As if recalled to his errand, he coughed a little nervously. "Not ready yet, my dear? You've not much more than half an hour before the 'spread' to the Eastcotts, you know. Some of the guests are here even now! By the way, Mrs. Eastcott sent you these for the dance." He drew a cluster of yellow tea-roses from behind his back with a boyish smile.

There was a note of tenderness in her father's voice which, coupled with something in his look a moment before as he stood in the doorway, touched Evelyn with an unconscious appeal. She sprang to her feet hastily and flung her arms about the intruding shoulders.

"Dear old Dad!" She kissed him on each cheek, and drew back to scrutinize him with approving admiration. As she did so, Colonel Deering noticed the letters which lay like a pack of cards scattered over the floor. A passing frown replaced the smile.

"Ah, ha! Now we know why my little girl is not ready! And there"—he nodded to the window where two long florist boxes lay unopened on the sill—"I see Mrs. Eastcott has been forestalled." Evelyn started guiltily, and her father advanced into the room and half-teasingly shuffled the letters with his foot. "Shall I pick them up

for you, dear? And tie them with this pink ribbon again, eh? ”

She gathered up the pile hastily with a self-conscious little laugh and dropped it into her trunk.

“ Heavy mail to-day? Or do you always carry your correspondence on a fortnight’s visit to Chicago? ”

“ Oh, Dad, give me the tea-roses! How good of Mrs. Eastcott! Do you know, I had forgotten all about those boxes in the window! They are from Señor Santos and Mr. Hammond, I suppose.”

She playfully waved the yellow roses in her father’s face, emphasizing her words with jerks of the fragrant bouquet. “ And—I don’t believe—I’ll wear—any flowers—but—Mrs. Eastcott’s! ” Then she pushed her unresisting visitor towards the door. “ Your daughter will be ready in twenty-five minutes, sir! ”

Colonel Deering laughed a little sadly. She looked to his parental affection so charmingly girlish with the flowing gown and loosened hair! “ Very well,” he answered. “ I’ll be back for you presently.”

Evelyn gave him another gentle push. “ Then you must really go,” she said. “ Why do you look at me like that? Is anything wrong, Father? ” Her gay tone changed to one of anxiety. “ You are not ill? ”

“ No, no! Ill? What a preposterous idea! Hurry, little one, I’ll return on the minute! ”

Evelyn’s companion at the complimentary din-

ner tendered to the travelers that evening was a surprise to her. She had expected to sit with her father, and how Winthrop Hammond had managed to secure the place beside her was a mystery. She observed that she was cleverly isolated from the others of their immediate party, and there was even some difficulty in discovering Señor Santos in the blurred perspective of a remote corner seat.

She glanced down the length of the dinner table toward her father. He seemed to her a shade less gay than usual. But when he looked up and their eyes met, she was reassured. He was devoting himself with Western gallantry to Mrs. Eastcott, who seemed to Evelyn distinguished from her companions by that quality of mind and dress which marks the fashionable mondaine of the metropolis. She thought that none of the other women wore their satins and jewels with precisely the same grace and accustomed ease. Endowed with wealth and refinements, she fancied they were still not wholly divorced from that age, just ending, which had witnessed frontier struggles and the fierce contests between civilization and the wilderness. Her father, in immaculate evening dress, seemed to her a type which linked the two extremes of the East and the West.

And Santos, the young Mexican with his Spanish courtliness and fervor—Winthrop, sturdy representative of matter-of-fact New England—who or what would link those two?

The man at her side was silent. But in his

eyes there was something that reminded her of the mute devotion and appeal of a St. Bernard. Was he composing a little speech for the confessional ear? She wondered how he would use this opportunity for which he had evidently been fencing during the last twenty-four hours.

She glanced at him archly. "You look precisely like Brother Ambrose," she remarked.

"And who's Brother Ambrose?" asked Winthrop with surprise. "I'm not sworn to celibacy, you know?"

Evelyn toyed with her wine glass. "Oh, he's a very good friend of mine! He has nice yellow locks and just your melancholy expression. You'll recognize him some day."

"If I'm melancholy, Miss Deering, it's because I made such an ass of myself yesterday afternoon. I was unpardonably rude, but I apologize most humbly. I thought——" He paused. His eyes were fixed upon the roses which rested in the billowy folds of her white chiffon gown where he had hoped to see his own mignonette and lilies-of-the-valley. His gaze challenged the flower.

Evelyn, guessing his hasty surmise, took a mischievous satisfaction in his discomfiture. "Some people are so clever at thinking." She recalled him demurely to his broken sentence.

The young man, evidently deciding to ignore the roses, accepted her suggestion. "You were a trump, Miss Deering, to come after us from Chicago. Truly, I was awfully glad to see you. But I was in a beast of a mood."

“ Really, Mr. Hammond? I had no idea before that you were a person of moods.”

“ But I’m not! That is, I never was until yesterday. To tell the truth, I was upset by—I thought——” He paused again blankly. How could he tell her what he had fancied? How could he reveal the mad jealousy and regret which had swept over him and mastered his reason and courtesy?

“ You mustn’t overtax yourself with so much meditation,” she cautioned. “ I’ve heard that the brain cells need frequent rests and relaxation from thought.”

“ Yes? ” said Winthrop politely. “ That is very interesting. But I wish I had a chance to show you what an even-tempered fellow I really am, Miss Deering. A child could play with me! ”

“ Delightful! I said you were precisely like Ambrose. Now he——”

“ Pardon me! I appreciate the compliment, but I’d rather talk about ourselves, if you don’t mind. You’ve no idea what your friendship means to me, Miss Deering, and I’m awfully cut up to have dishonored it, even for a moment.”

Evelyn laid down her fork. “ Dreadful! ” she exclaimed, regarding him with mock gravity. “ I had no idea your manner betokened anything so terrible as that. What are you going to do to expiate your disloyalty? ”

Winthrop’s eyes traveled slowly over toward the distant Santos, and back again to his neighbor. “ What do you suggest? ” he asked.

“ A penance on your knees up the towering cliffs of the pueblo of Acoma! A promise to yield up your soul utterly to the poetry of New Mexico! You shake your head? You are hard to please, Mr. Hammond. Then you shall pay your debt to friendship by never again questioning anything it does, no matter what pranks it chooses to play. There! Your expiation is begun. You cannot escape.”

“ I don't wish to! The penitent thanks the high priestess for her mercy.” He bowed to her good-humoredly. “ Is it—is it forbidden to ask what you meant by a telegram from me? ” He brought out the words as if he feared her refusal to admit the question.

Instead of denying him, however, she spoke at once quite frankly. “ Why, the telegram from—I have forgotten—some little town in New York State—which said your arrival was indefinitely postponed on account of unavoidable delays.”

“ Postponed? Delays? ” repeated Winthrop with surprise. “ Why, we had no unexpected delays. The journey was perfect.”

“ Then what did you mean? The telegram was a joke? And we failed to see the point? ” Evelyn knitted her brows in perplexed retrospection.

“ A poor joke, then, and one for which I'm not responsible! Honestly, I never sent you a telegram. We arrived in Chicago exactly as we planned, and all the way from New York I was counting the days to meeting you.”

She looked at him and smiled in a gentle,

friendly fashion as he leaned earnestly toward her. The perfume of the yellow roses floated to him, but it only served to accentuate the greater sweetness of that moment in which he reveled in mutual sympathy restored.

“Then who did send it?” she asked in a puzzled tone after the slight pause. “We certainly had a telegram signed with your name, and we certainly left Chicago because of that slip of yellow paper.”

Winthrop straightened his shoulders with sudden decision. “I don’t know who sent it. But I’ll find out if it takes ten years! I don’t suppose you have the slip still?”

“No—I’ll ask father. He may have thrust it into a pocket somewhere. But don’t trouble about it now. Let us talk of the pueblos and the canyons, of rocks that glow like great desert lamps, and of all the wonderful things you are going to see.”

The next two hours lingered afterward in Winthrop Hammond’s memory as an exquisite fairy tale. Dinner, speeches, the opening of the informal dance, and Santos’ angry eyes as Evelyn was whirled away, were all blended into a background for a graceful, dark-crowned head and a pair of white shoulders, which rose from a fall of lace and chiffon. Evelyn’s presence, Evelyn’s words, Evelyn’s laughter, swept Winthrop into a world of delicious intoxication. If he had been in love when he left New York, the events of the last few days had infinitely increased his passion.

When the dance was over he led her to where

Mrs. Eastcott and her father stood in lively conversation. Santos, who was beside them, made a peremptory motion, but Colonel Deering politely intercepted him.

“One moment, Señor! Evelyn, Mrs. Eastcott has an invitation for you.”

“Oh, my dear——” Mrs. Eastcott stretched out a white-gloved, persuasive hand to Evelyn. “I want you to come with us for a week or so in the automobile—to continue the journey you began at Falls City, you know. I have everything all planned. You are to take the trip over the Santa Fé Trail with us and meet your father again at Santa Fé. You will come, will you not?”

“Oh! how good of you,” Evelyn cried, with unaffected pleasure. “But, Father——”

“Bully for you, Aunt Nell! It’s a capital idea!” cried Winthrop. “Of course you must come with us, Miss Deering.” To have her beside him in the car for eight or ten whole days! The Santa Fé Trail loomed before Winthrop, a vision of Earthly Paradise.

Mrs. Eastcott rapped her nephew’s knuckles with her fan. “What have you to say about it, young man? I thought you considered this too dangerous a trip for ladies!”

“But, really,——” Evelyn began doubtfully, and glanced at her father as if trying to interpret his wishes.

Colonel Deering was looking at Santos thoughtfully. “I think you had better go, dear,” he said,

bringing his glance back to his daughter. "The trip will be a delightful experience for you."

The exultant, opening strains of a Strauss waltz floated across the ballroom. With a half-expressed exclamation Santos laid his hand on Evelyn's arm and tapped his foot impatiently on the polished floor.

"It is our dance, Señorita," he said, drawing Evelyn from Winthrop's side. "Pardon, Señora, shall not the Señorita decide as she waltzes?" He bowed to the party with decorative grace and, leading the girl hastily away with an air of complete possession, swept with her into the midst of the pirouetting, gliding throng.

"Was I not right, Miss Deering? Did I not guess your secret thoughts?" His voice was almost a whisper; his eyes shone with the keenness of stiletto points, close to hers. "You did not wish to go? Once before you were forced to ride with the Americanos. This time, my Señorita shall do as she desires!"

Before Evelyn could reply, his tone and manner had changed.

"You wear a rose, Señorita—a yellow rose? Is it then that the red flowers, which were matched to the crimson of your cheeks, did not arrive? Ah, the florist,—false, despicable one—he did not send them. He shall feel my whip about his shoulders."

Evelyn had never before danced with the Mexican. The staccato throbs of the Viennese music blended with his impassioned words. Winthrop

and the unimaginative somnolence of the previous waltz already seemed æons remote from this man who danced as if the motion were no mere amusement or acquired art but a beautiful and solemn ritual of the spirited race from which he sprang. Quickened into exuberant life by the spell of the moment, she tossed her head coquettishly.

“ Oh, Señor, spare the florist knave! Your flowers arrived—with others. You see, my dear Señor, I had to choose.”

“ Choose? When I would see you as Carmen wearing the flaming flowers in your hair? ”

Evelyn made no answer. She felt his eyes upon her in the long gaze—the *mirada*—which the immobility of the Spanish woman's countenance renders inoffensive, even complimentary. His grasp tightened round her waist with the suggestion of a caress.

Suddenly he withdrew her from the whirling crowd. A young girl with a basket of flowers and favors was standing near the door. Without a word Santos seized a scarlet poincetta, and dropping a coin in its place, turned to Evelyn with a ceremonious flourish. “ You will not deny me, Señorita? You will play Carmen for one half hour? ” He held out the crimson flower. “ For your hair! ”

“ You are irresistible, Señor,” she smiled, taking the poincetta and thrusting it jauntily into the waves of her brown hair.

The music grew fainter and fainter until the rhythmic throb of the violins sounded like the

tremulous sigh of a dying wind. The rose-shaded lights seemed to float mystically in a fairy scene. In a distant corner a recess had been screened by palms and softly illuminated by a lamp that hung suspended from the beak of a huge bronze eagle. Santos drew a low, wicker chair into the dim light, and proffered Evelyn a seat. Through the leafy screen she could see the distant kaleidoscopic picture of the ballroom. The music was a breath, languorous and sweet, in her ears.

There was a significant pause. Santos, who stood with his back to the lamplight, regarded her with embarrassing intentness.

“If I am Carmen, Señor, who are you?” asked Evelyn, slowly pulling off one of her gloves.

Santos raised his brows with a sigh. “I know, Señorita! Shall I say it?”

“No, I think you’d better not,” said Evelyn hastily. “That isn’t what I meant at all.” She laughed lightly. “You see I speak my mind with frankness. Was not that always the privilege of Carmen?”

“There cannot be a Carmen without a lover,” persisted the other. “That is how you shall think of me, Señorita. Is it not so?”

Evelyn leaned forward and looked through the palms at the distant dancers. Then she glanced at her companion as if to read the meaning behind the words. Even in the shadow of Santos’ position she could not fail to see his eagerness. “Ah, you play your part too well, Señor!” she said gayly. “You are forgetting the Andalusian

eyes and the delicate Murillo heads under the *reboso* of your countrywomen." She half rose from her chair. " Shall we not——? "

Santos stood angrily erect. " Bah! The automobile ride—it is of that you are thinking! " he exclaimed with apparent irrelevance. Then, with sudden and deft change of manner he laid his hand lightly on her wrist.

" Señorita, you spoke of the Andalusian eyes. *Ay de mi!* I shall tell you! In New Mexico the beauty of the Spanish women is no more. It is gone. It has been stolen by the mountains and the rocks, the hills and the plains. The women——? They are wrinkled and haggard. They are left in piteous neglect."

" Then how shall I dare to stay in New Mexico? " asked Evelyn. And as she raised her head with an airy coquetry, the great, red flower fell unnoticed to the floor.

Santos' voice had a note of subdued passion as he replied. " For me there is but one country—one in the whole world. It is New Mexico, where the hills are life and light, and the men—stagnation and dust! Your beauty, Señorita, shall revive my poor, dead country—shall rival the hills. *Quien sabe!* " He bent over her. " That is why I am your slave—your lover. Ah! I have said it! " He bent still lower, and kissed her hand devoutly.

She did not attempt to withdraw it. There was something impersonal in the emotional depth of his words that seemed to pass beyond the borders

of mere self-interest into the realms of a fine, chivalric patriotism, as though he had seen his fair country pre-figured in her. He drew himself up like one of those courtly knights, who of old rode out to tempt Fortune in her high places. The tall, lithe figure might have stepped out of the canvas of a Velasquez to plead his love, with a madrigal and a guitar, beneath the young moon and the citron shades. Then he laid his arm along the back of her chair, bringing his face on a level with hers.

She sat dreamily, with her hands clasped upon her knee. The long, white gloves fell across her wrist; her train curved in sweeping lines, like a pearly barrier, between them. The lamplight fell on the loose swaths of heavy hair above her ivory-white forehead and illumined the flesh of arms and throat with a rosy, opalescent sheen.

“ You love it—my New Mexico? ”

“ Yes! ” she said softly.

“ You feel its spell, the lure of warmth and light and—love? ”

“ I feel the spell of its Past,” she answered with a far-off gaze, her finely molded lips slightly parted in an elusive smile. “ I see you standing for that Past, a time when Spain had great dreams and did great deeds—when your wonderful people colored the history of the whole world.”

“ Ah! ” He breathed a long sigh.

“ You wear a rapier at your side. You stand in a flowery garden. There are walls—and a window of arabesque design. From above you, a

Spanish Señorita with odalisque eyes looks down—and beckons! ”

He nodded encouragingly. “ The beautiful Rosalita, watching from her bower? ”

“ And wearing the favors of her lover. ” She finished his sentence. “ The scene changes. There comes wafted from over the sea to the noble Castilian the rumor of fabulous wealth, of dream-cities amid the Everglades, of the Fountain of Youth and the Seven Golden Cities of Cibola. The Spanish Señorita waits, listening, hoping—in vain? ”

“ There is only one Señorita for a Santos—you—you! ” he broke in hotly. But she did not appear to hear him.

“ You are wandering somewhere in the shadows of a new and unknown world, fighting myriads of imaginary foes, enchanted with the sirens’ honeyed songs, subjugating races by the power of the Holy Cross. Ah, Señor, could you but command that Past to return! Could you but give Spain her dreams again, fair New Mexico her roses instead of ashes of roses! ”

“ You are right, my Señorita! But it is of the Present I would speak. I would be to you more real, more living! ” He seized her hand and pressed it against his breast. “ It is beating—throbbing for you! Señorita, I love you—love you! ” His kisses fell impulsively on her hands.

Suddenly Evelyn was on her feet, laughing low but hysterically.

“ You have broken my image! Oh, Señor, you

have dashed my idols to the ground," she gasped.

The distant music ended with a flourish of wailing violins. Footsteps, drowned before in the melody, fell on their ears, and Santos glanced toward the ballroom impatiently. "I have surprised you? You have been blind to my adoration? Ah, Señorita, so beautiful, yet so cruel!"

Evelyn made a movement as if to flee, and Santos caught her hands again in his.

"But your father—he has not been blind," he said. "He had no surprise when this afternoon I told him I would wed you!" He paused to note the effect of his words. "Wed you, Señorita—I, a Santos, would link my life forever with yours! I would see you re-enter New Mexico in state upon a steed all decked with Spanish gold and crimson trappings. These others—they would take you in the automobile. Bah! Is it thus my Carmen should come to her own?"

Beyond the screen of palms a light step hesitated, paused.

Santos pressed her hands closer in his own. She struggled to pull them away, but he drew her toward him. "My Carmen!" he breathed.

A hand pushed aside the palms. "Is Miss Deering here? Her father is looking——"

Evelyn, with a supreme effort, broke away from the Mexican's detaining hold.

"Mrs. Eastcott!" she cried. "I want to tell you—to say—I accept your invitation."

CHAPTER VIII

It was with burning cheeks and sparkling eyes that Evelyn rejoined the circle of her friends. She had a guilty sense that Mrs. Eastcott had guessed the cause of her visible embarrassment and heightened color, though neither that lady's manner nor words betrayed any consciousness of the passionate nature of the scene which had been interrupted. Nevertheless, when Winthrop begged for another dance, and Evelyn refused, saying that she did not mean to dance again that evening, Mrs. Eastcott accepted the decision with almost too little concern. Evelyn even fancied that the chaperon scrutinized Señor Santos with polite discretion when, at the end of the evening, that gentleman reappeared to bid the party good-night. The girl herself averted her eyes and bowed without giving him her hand.

But later Evelyn lay awake for a long time thinking of what Santos had said. Was it really possible that her dear old Dad had not been surprised at the news of the Mexican's love, and that he had given his consent to the wooing? She could hardly believe so, but she understood now the shadow on his face when he came to her room before the dinner. It had been the visible result of his interview with Santos. And why had Santos

endeavored to arm himself with parental authority before speaking with her? American fathers were not the arbiters of their daughters' affairs of the heart. For the first time Evelyn wished that the Mexican were not quite so thoroughly medieval. Winthrop Hammond, she thought, would have—— Like a flash, the scene at Falls City, illumined, came to her mind—Winthrop's coldness, his passionate reproach. The Easterner was jealous of the attentions of Santos! He had been quick to discern the Mexican's affection for her merely by finding Santos in her company.

And yet to Evelyn, and to her father also, it had seemed natural enough to come across Santos in the Chicago hotel, and to journey homeward toward New Mexico in his company. They had often met him in Santa Fé and Albuquerque, and once or twice before they had all traveled together from one city to the other. For though Señor Santos was a comparatively new friend, and it was not many months since Colonel Deering had introduced him to his daughter as a business acquaintance, the young man had already drifted into a position of easy familiarity at the ranch, and long rides together across the *vegas* had done much to increase his growing admiration for the daughter of his host. At Santa Fé and at Albuquerque, Santos was intimately connected with the most prominent families of the old Mexican régime, and thither the Deerings had often journeyed in pursuit of pleasure or of business. Once Santos, meeting them unexpectedly in the capital, had per-

suaded them to accompany him to his own ranch. The days that they had spent amid that almost feudal splendor, which had been the pride of the old Don, were ones that Evelyn would not soon forget. This had been her first intimate association with the past of New Mexico—a past compounded of sadness and smiles. Fresh from the gloom and misery of one of the poverty stricken districts of Chicago, she had been almost unduly impressed by the romance and picturesqueness of Santos' home, and of a phase of Mexican life which seemed more fitting for the purple plains of Old Castile than for the soil which the God of Battles had decreed should pass into alien ownership. From her host's lips she had heard the pathetic story of his languishing race; but, with him, she had caught a glimpse of the smoldering fires of Hope—Hope for a reawakening and a regeneration, when the one-time Spanish lords of the Continent which Columbus had bequeathed to them and which Coronado and De Vaca and De Soto had explored in the bygone centuries, should again come into their own. Vague enough the dream seemed to her even now; she only half comprehended its true significance, but it filled her with enthusiasm for the patriotism which fired the spirit of this handsome young heir to his father's vast estates.

And Santos himself? To an outsider there would have been no disguising the fact that he exercised over this sensitive, high-spirited American girl, to whom Beauty had of late become al-

most a religion, a strange power and fascination. If Winthrop was simpler and more direct than any man of her previous acquaintance, the Mexican was more subtle and gallant. Each extreme had its own appeal to different sides of her nature, and to each she yielded with frank enjoyment. But Señor Santos, more than Winthrop, was associated with the inner experiences of the last few months.

For Evelyn, weary with the hurry and bustle of the city and saddened by the sight of ignorance and suffering, had fallen an easy victim to the charms of the Southwest. Its calm, blue skies and radiant sunsets, its wild, mysterious canyons, its purpling mountains over which the changing mists hung diaphanous curtains that half revealed, half concealed undreamed loveliness, its solitudes and its wide "meadows" and plains,—all these conveyed to her at first an inexpressibly delicious sense of restfulness and peace. But as her mind gradually resumed its normal outlook upon life, she was conscious of a stimulating influence in the scenery of the Southwest that set her heart throbbing and her eyes peering through the iridescent mists as if life held a new glory, more precious, more divine than any she had ever before discovered. And perhaps because she yielded herself passionately and with utter absorption to the strange, wild beauty of the land, she became herself more beautiful. The richness of coloring of the buttes and mesas that she loved was reflected on her cheeks and lips. The warm sunlight, in

which she basked, danced in her eyes; the tenderness of the violet nights touched her voice to greater sweetness. The charm of her personality deepened in proportion to the new depth which her nature had attained.

Señor Santos was not only an admiring but a sympathetic friend. He understood perfectly the charm of the Southwest, and while he rode and walked with the lovely Señorita, he told her many a legend of his beloved New Mexico and did his gracious best to enhance for her its poetry and romance.

And now, thought Evelyn, Santos was her declared lover! Only twenty-four hours before, Winthrop Hammond had for the first time betrayed the nature of his own regard for her. Suddenly, as it seemed to Evelyn, she had two lovers; and she was girl enough to feel a little thrill of exuberant satisfaction that was also half a fear.

Two lovers! The day before, she had avoided Winthrop's eyes. Now it was Santos she did not wish to face, and whom she had shunned. Evelyn laughed to herself with light vexation at the humorous incongruity of the situation. And because she laughed and because she was amused by the very evident distaste of the two men for each other's society, she went to sleep secure in the thought that she was not in love with either.

But when the Eastcott automobile rolled away next morning from Kansas City to follow the Santa Fé Trail across the plains of Kansas and she had waved farewell to her father and Señor

Santos, she found herself wondering how soon she would meet the handsome Mexican again and in what manner he would renew his love-making. For she knew that even her sudden decision to accompany the Eastcotts to Santa Fé had been to him nothing more than coquetry, and that it would not be easy to convince him that her heart did not respond to his fiery protestations.

Well, she thought, she would not reach Santa Fé for over a week at least. She need not trouble herself about Señor Santos, nor his devotion for the present. And gayly casting her care to the winds that blew in her eager face, she gave herself up to the delights of the journey.

CHAPTER IX

On the level plains of Western Kansas, civilization appears to have made little inroad against a prevailing, treeless desolation and to have abandoned any serious attempt to introduce the habitations of men. For miles, unchallenged, the tiny prairie dogs industriously burrow out their colonies in the sand, and the coyote skulks from the hurrying traveler—howling symbol of the lawless wild.

But in the East, near the former frontier settlements of Missouri, amid the gently rolling prairies which surround the broad and fertile valley of the Arkansas River, there is plenty of evidence of civilization and of human activity. Where, of old, upon the horizon, the unprotected traveler watched anxiously for a cloud of dust raised by the ponies of an advancing Indian band, the tourist of to-day will find the smoke of many a thriving town. In what was once an arid zone, where now wave broad fields of golden wheat and corn, it is hard to conjure up the Past with its stories of adventure and picturesque romance; for on every hand there is testimony of the transforming influences of settlement upon the plains which, so short a time ago, formed the theater of a bitter and relentless warfare between the American aborigine and the white invader of the soil.

When the precious document that sealed the great Louisiana Purchase was signed, this huge stretch of plain and prairie was a vast and barren waste, the hunting ground of Pawnees and Apaches, Comanches and Cheyennes, Arapahoes and Sioux. No one guessed then that it would prove more than a buffer territory which would effectually protect American frontiers against the possibilities of Spanish invasion from the West. No one dreamed that out of the small beginnings of a trade route with Mexico would spring a Trail whose checkered history has played the most important rôle in the drama of Western life.

The Santa Fé Trail! The automobile traveler of to-day needs but to don the magic spectacles of imagination to transform the scudding car into a huge bird on whose wings he is borne into the romantic land of dreams and historic memories. Before him is Independence, no longer the attractive "suburb" of a modern Kansas City, but a quaint group of sheds and rough log-houses for the trappers of the wild, surrounding country. Shift but the fairy goggles by a hair's breadth, and the little village has grown into the outfitting station for the commercial trade with Santa Fé, well-nigh a thousand miles towards the setting sun. The primitive town square with its bedwarfed, one-storied "city hall," is packed with a heterogeneous crowd of hardy pioneers. Kentuckians, Missourians, Tennesseans, Ohioans—from every quarter of the backwoods they have come to this rallying point. On pack-trains and wagons drawn

by sad-faced, long-eared mules, the fur companies are sending out great loads for the Indians with whom their agents barter. Here, a mule-train has just returned with the skins and pelts procured, in exchange, from the savages of the plains; there, close by, caravans of traders have united their forces for protection against the Indians, and march slowly forth in a long procession to take the Trail. Three hundred patient quadrupeds, every small back weighted with several hundred pounds—scores of great wagons, each drawn by six yokes of burly oxen and piled with every kind of merchandise from cloth to pink beads—and half a hundred stalwart, determined, fiercely armed men—what a company they all make! What a fleet are the white-topped prairie schooners, loaded with a precious cargo of women and children and cook-stoves, and ready to valiantly embark on that long journey across the plains through dangers and hardships and Indian storms!

One readjusts the magic spectacles. With a sudden clatter of many hoofs, there sweeps into view a big Concord coach, glittering with paint and varnish, and brave with armed outriders to guard the mails and the palpitating, oddly assorted, fortune-tempting passengers! Two of the hardier souls are on the boot with the coatless driver; others are stuffed uncomfortably into the narrow seats of the gaping interior; all have paid two hundred and fifty silver dollars apiece for the danger-fraught journey and their coffee and hard-tack and bacon, and all look as if they would be

glad enough to get safely beyond the level wastes and over the rugged passes of the mountains. Off they go, at last, amid a clattering of hoofs and a cracking of whips and jokes and a cloud of impenetrable dust. And then—the enchanted “urim and thummim” plays a curious trick! Coaches and mule teams and caravans suddenly disappear, and there lies Independence, lonely and deserted, the years of traffic abruptly suspended by the Mexican War. When the battles are over and Uncle Sam has put New Mexico into his vest pocket, staunch old Independence has lost the honey of overland commerce, and grubby little Westport has begun to grow with amazing speed into modern Kansas City.

But even while one sighs for past visions, behold, there comes another procession! Thousands of men, leading their women and children by the hand, are running away from the East and scurrying out over the old Santa Fé Trail toward golden-paved Denver and California. “Pike’s Peak or Bust!”—that is the chorus they sing as they scramble along toward the fabled treasures. And Independence and Kansas City are both busy enough now, sheltering the throngs and speeding them on their Aladdin-like journey along the Trail to Fortune and the Unknown!

Winthrop Hammond needed no fairy spectacles to revive for him the historic memories of the Santa Fé Trail. The “pilots,” who were always appearing at unexpected turns of the road to escort the Eastcotts through Kansas, were well-

versed in local lore, and only too ready to tell the stories of adventurous pioneering and Indian raids. Here, there was a city hall built upon the scene of a famous skirmish; there, was a town square little changed from the days when the caravans passed that way. "Oldest Inhabitants" sprang up like beanstalks out of the very ground, and were led proudly forth to rehearse their experiences as "Bull-whackers" and to explain how they had contrived to escape with their scalps into the safety of the twentieth century. Men whose fathers had carried the mails across the prairies or had taken chances of death or lingering torture as daring messengers of the "Pony Express"—others who had themselves known the intrepid scout, Kit Carson—sheriffs who had subdued, at the point of a gun, turbulent cowboy villages and now spoke softly, with the accent of gentlemen, to the ladies in the tonneau—all these brought the Past into such intimate touch with the Present that Winthrop felt more as if he were taking an unexpected journey into another world than traveling as newspaper correspondent on a Transcontinental tour.

But not only did the "pilots" and the incidents of the Trail combine to produce this novel world; the presence of Evelyn Deering by his side, as day after day he whirled over the smooth Kansas roads, colored the drab levels to a strange beauty even while it intensified for him their tragic association. He could not forget that fifty, forty, even thirty years ago Evelyn would have been in terri-



"Pilots were always appearing at unexpected turns of the road."

ble danger on this vast stretch of prairie and plain. He was conscious of a certain sympathy with Mrs. Eastcott in her nervous shudders at the grewsome tales of past horrors, even while he basked in the charm of Evelyn's enthusiasm.

For it was not long before Winthrop discovered that Evelyn, though she had never before journeyed along the Trail by automobile, was nevertheless in familiar country. Its legends and its history were as vital to her as to the "Oldest Inhabitant" himself. She loved the wind-swept levels, with their purple horizons and ocean-wide solitudes, as Kit Carson and the pioneers loved them of old. When Winthrop spoke of the horrible butchery—the holocaust for the sake of civilization—which the Trail represented, she listened, gravely sympathetic. But there was a light in her eyes as she looked at the old highway, seamed and scarred but still plainly discernible on the unplowed wastes and along the gentle lines of the low, barren hills, that told him she was thinking more of the undaunted courage and indomitable spirit of the pioneers than of their hardships and dangers.

Oh, the shadowy feet that had marked out that pathway for the Concord coaches and the Californian dreamers—treacherous red feet gliding along the river bank—brave, tired white ones, hurrying through the broad, fertile Arkansas Valley where there was plenty of water and game, plenty of grass for the cattle, but not even the rude hut of a single settler to offer slight protection! Eve-

lyn thrilled to the sound of those historic footsteps as they beat in time to the automobile. Never had she felt so great a love for her glorious West; never had she responded so joyously to its wild romance and charm. Dodge City, Cimarron Crossing, Walnut Creek—she greeted them all with enthusiasm, though all had been the scenes of repeated Indian attack upon the helpless caravans.

Winthrop, who for her sake could not forget the rude crosses that marked the graves along the Trail, laughed good-naturedly at her delight. But she was not disconcerted.

“ Oh,” she cried blithely; “ of course Mrs. Eastcott is right to like the peaceful fields and homes and the kind, noisy locomotives! Any woman ought. I can’t think what is the matter with me that I should love Buffalo Bill and Kit Carson and the wilderness so much! ”

“ Perhaps you are the least bit unprogressive? ” suggested Winthrop in a voice of mingled teasing and admiration.

“ That must be it,” she assented. “ If any of the old plainsmen were to gather up their bones into their bodies again and saunter out of their graves, what a shock they would have to find an automobile out here on the Trail! ”

But in spite of its tragic memories, Winthrop, fired at last by Evelyn’s ardor, was conscious of a very real patriotic thrill as the automobile drew up at the foot of Pawnee Rock on the western edge of Kansas. No spot on American soil had furnished the scene of more bitter and relentless

warfare than this strange outcropping of stone amid the limitless plains. Here Indians of every tribe had swooped down for ages, at first to wrest the surrounding buffalo pasturage from enemies of their own race, and, later, to lay siege upon the hapless bands of trappers or traders who sought refuge behind the rocky fastness—siege that could have but one outcome, the starvation and massacre of the Whites by their foes. Of old one of the most picturesque spots upon the Trail, Pawnee Rock had now, by ruthless quarrying, lost much of its dignity as well as its size, until in the eleventh hour the villagers had attempted to preserve the precious memorial by fencing it into a public park.

Winthrop climbed with Evelyn and Mrs. Eastcott to the summit by a short, winding path. To the south the river flowed sluggishly on its way, unmindful of time or change; on all sides the view of the wilderness, broken only by the roofs and chimneys of Larned, stretched, mysterious and beautiful, to the horizon. He drew a long breath. It was his—this citadel of the plains, almost as important to every American as Plymouth Rock itself. But for the stern courage and the unconquerable will of those pioneers of whom Evelyn dreamed, neither he nor she would have been standing there on that disintegrated mass of old sandstone; the automobile journey together along the Trail—the journey which meant so much to him—would never have taken place.

As he led her down the path the old plainsmen

seemed very real to them both, and the enemies of American civilization but puerile and shadowy wraiths. And without any apparent connection of thought, Winthrop held the slender, gauntleted hand more tightly in his, and told himself that Santos was very far away.

CHAPTER X

NATURE has done her best to erect an impregnable line of demarcation which shall shut off all access from the North to the mysterious Southwest. As a fact, however, the rocky barrier of the Raton Mountains between Colorado and New Mexico is no more formidable as a path to Santa Fé than the innocent looking Trail which leads thither by the Cimarron crossing of the Arkansas. On the mountains the pioneer ascended into the clouds; in the lowlands he was entrapped into sandy wastes. One portion of the pathway impressed him with its canyons and ravines; the other tantalized him with its dying rivers and its scorching levels. On the Cimarron Trail he dropped with thirst to the sands that had sucked the streams dry; in the mountains he was beset with the lonely terrors of the steep pass and the lofty solitudes.

The automobile that now sallies forth from Trinidad to gain the wonderland of New Mexico faces a wall of impenetrable mountains which tower in a gigantic mass over the winding Trail. As it ascends, the wildness and desolation increase. Higher and higher the path climbs, past a shabby mining village, nearer and nearer the heavens. The outlines of distant peaks grow

more definite. At last the " wall " resolves itself into a lofty, winding, and undulating plateau. Below the bold intruder there stretches an apparently fathomless gulf, and here and there, against the dark green of the hills, appears a line of blue smoke where panting engines are laboriously creeping upward over the mountains.

When Eastcott had last made the crossing of the Raton Mountains, he had journeyed by train. Powerful locomotives had dragged a few cars upward at a snail's pace over rails that wound tortuously like gigantic serpents into the heart of the mists. Every wheel had shrieked its protest at the strain; every blast from the panting locomotive had reverberated against the walls of the precipices like blows from a Vulcan's hammer. But the breathless glamour of that trip had lingered in his memory, and though now the " scenic highway," constructed by convict labor, swept upward over the Pass, he had set his automobile to the ascent with some misgiving. The grim Spirit of the Mountains seemed to defy an easy conquest.

But the automobile had slowly and without any great difficulty climbed the road. Fifty years before, when even the railroad was an undreamed dream, caravans and pack-trains, with unspeakable hardship and danger, had scaled these narrow paths and the immense terraces washed out by the melting snows. Strange Destiny that brought an automobile to the winding waters of Raton Creek, where of old exhausted mules and horses, tugging caravans along the precipitous route, had bathed



"She loved the wind-swept levels with their purple horizons and ocean wide solitudes."

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their parched muzzles in the friendly stream! Fifty years, and man's ingenuity had furnished an unwearied steed to climb a highway which challenged the roads of the Alps as an example of modern engineering!

Yet Nature, insubordinate in her subjection, scorned to betray any sense of companionship with man or sympathy with his ways. She had molded the Raton Mountains in the heroic fashion characteristic of her triumphs in the New World. In the tremendous slopes swept bare of soil and vegetation by the gigantic swath of the avalanche, in the bald, bare summit of the Pass, she still asserted her majestic might and glory.

From the nook, two miles below the top of the Pass, where the Eastcott party encamped for luncheon, the view of the valley and of the sun-swept, windy Trail along which the automobile had climbed was partly shut off by a group of sheltering bushes to windward. Far away, beyond the purpling glimpses of the lowlands, the opal-tinted, snow-crowned Spanish Peaks pierced the azure sky, and now and then a puff of vapor, that might have been a Mist God's wing or a new-born cloud, floated down their majestic slopes. There was a strange incongruity between the lonely grandeur of the scene and the automobile, standing silent and motionless by the roadside.

At some little distance from the automobile, in a clearing among the bushes, Winthrop and Evelyn sat side by side on a steamer rug. Close by an empty picnic basket perched on a jutting

rock, and, just beyond, were visible a pair of feminine feet encased in small, velvet "pumps," which protruded, toes upward, from behind the brushwood. Winthrop, lounging comfortably on the rug, surveyed his companion with undisguised approval as she bent over a notebook in which she wrote rapidly with a lead pencil. The valley below, bathed in sunshine—the lofty crags above—the distant mountains—all were hushed to a majestic peace.

"I feel like Othello—with my occupation gone," he remarked, contentedly puffing at his pipe.

"I'm only interpolating a bit here and there in your report," protested Evelyn gayly, looking up from the notebook on her knee.

Winthrop blew a ring of smoke lazily into the sunshine. Then he reached over and seized the notebook with a laugh. "I'll do a bit of 'interpolating' on my own account," he exclaimed. "'In choosing the suitable automobile costume for the Western Trail, one should bear in mind that a clever blend of the latest thing in golf apparel with sundry articles of Indian attire—to wit, Navajo blankets, wampum belts, bead hand-bags, and red-tipped eagle feathers jauntily stuck in scarlet scarfs on felt hats—are in order.' How's that? Rather snappy, don't you think? Sure to catch Knight's attention? "

"That's nothing but an advertisement of a clothing house! You need sub-editing badly." Evelyn shook her head in demure reproof. "But we are quibbling, Mr. Journalist. You will never

accomplish a rapid ascent of the literary ladder unless you learn to stick more closely to your subject than this."

"I'm better at sticking to people than subjects, you know."

Evelyn tried to frown under the brim of the felt hat with matter-of-fact displeasure. "Would you like to hear what you say?" she asked, recovering the notebook.

"Delighted!"

She was already scribbling again industriously. The long, gay cloak, thought Winthrop, was daringly effective against the browns and dark greens of the landscape. The eagle's feather suggested the head-dress of an Indian princess; the bead chatelaine on her wrist was charmingly original and appropriate. Who but Evelyn Deering would have designed and engineered such a costume? Who would have worn it with such spirited grace? She had been lovely in her ball dress of chiffon. In her Navajo blanket cloak she was bewitching. She had caught and crystallized the romance of Trail and scene.

The flying pencil came to a stop. Evelyn began to read in a soft, musical voice. "Ranches and romance are not the only interest of the Santa Fé Trail. Nice little granite monuments, such as one might find on Alpine roads, are stuck into the Trail at intervals and labeled '1822-1872'—woman monuments, to show that the Trail, like the Garden of Eden, really belonged to petticoats and puffs." She paused dramatically.

“ Shades of Uncle Dick Wootan! ” ejaculated Winthrop. “ Is that what all those harmless little stones set up by the Daughters of the American Revolution mean? ”

“ Why, of course! You don’t say that you missed the point? ” asked Evelyn graciously.

“ Well, I’ll be—sunburned! What business have those women upsetting the traditions of our manly Trail, I’d like to know? ”

She turned to the notebook. “ Men populated these wilds for the sake of the future homesteads of their dreams. But they dared nothing which women did not dare with them. Whether their destiny was to return with the hollow Dead Sea Fruit of Pike’s Peak, or to seek the Golden Shores by way of the canyons and mountain paths of New Mexico and Arizona, they made the Trail with women by their side. When they met Comanches or Apaches or Pawnees, their wives encouraged the wounded husbands or fathers in the dreadful struggle, and stuffed the guns with bullets for the dancing, howling savages. Women starved and thirsted; and women and men alike saw their hopes fade to a mocking mirage of the desert. The men died and their women died with them—victims of cold and hunger or of Indian treachery and Indian revenge. No; man on the Santa Fé Trail was never alone.”

“ Bravo! Bravo! ” cried Winthrop. “ My dear Fellow-Journalist, your pencil glides along with the ease of a suffragette’s. The only fitting background for this ‘ copy ’ is a procession of

Mrs. Pankhursts flaunting banners as the Apaches flaunted the scalps of their lady victims. But I am thinking of that telling phrase you—er—‘ interpolated ’: ‘ Man was never alone.’ ” He gave her a look that half alarmed, half fascinated her.

“ Oh, that’s just put in to make the metre come right,” Evelyn hastily declared. How brown and strong he was as he lounged on the steamer rug! His hands looked so firm, so masculinely large! Santos’ hands, she remembered, were olive hued and slender. Would New England or Spanish hands, she wondered, be stronger to pull one out of trouble, if one needed help? There flashed suddenly into her mind the legend of the Purgatory River—the “ Picketwire ” of the Yankees—which yesterday she had passed just before reaching Trinidad. She thought of the Spanish regiments marching so gayly along the river on their way to Florida, and of their complete and mysterious disappearance. Yesterday she had been touched with the wild romance of the melancholy tale, wondering whether Indians or river were responsible for the tragedy. To-day, with these strong, bronzed hands so near hers, she fancied that Señor Santos had dropped out of her life as utterly as the Spanish soldiers had long ago dropped out of the lives of their sweethearts and wives.

Winthrop, who could not guess her thoughts, continued meditatively. “ But it’s beautifully true, isn’t it? I’m not alone in spite of these vast solitudes. And, Miss Deering—I’ve not been alone ever since last sum——”

“Of course it’s true!” she interrupted. “There are Mrs. Eastcott’s dear little velvet toes sticking out from behind that bush. She’ll wake up presently and your report won’t be done.”

He continued to regard Evelyn with ruminative interest. “I’ve mailed that telegram which was signed with my name back to Binghamton, where it came from,” he remarked.

She was all attention. “Not really? But the office there can surely never tell you who sent it out so long ago.”

“Well, we had quite an ovation there and impressed ourselves on everybody’s notice pretty thoroughly. I fancy they’ll remember us. Lucky your father hadn’t lost the telegraph blank. I think it will give us a clew somehow, don’t you?”

“Perhaps! No, really I’m afraid not. Anyway, what does it matter? We met at last and we’re having a glorious journey. What more do you want in this lovely Indian Summer weather?”

“A great deal,” he said with embarrassing fervor, his eyes on hers;—“the scalp of the individual who sent that message for one thing,” he added grimly. “When I gave McNulty the letter to mail at Dodge City, I said——”

“Well?”

“Nothing.”

“You must have been dramatic.”

“I was.”

“Declaiming nothing? That is true genius! But speaking of the chauffeur—do you know I

have the strangest feeling of having seen him somewhere before."

"You dreamed about me and saw him on the front seat of the visionary automobile."

"Never! I have only day dreams, and those are about Indians and Spanish heroes and handsome troubadours with guitars and——"

"I shouldn't think you'd care for Spaniards and Mexicans." Winthrop knew he was venturing on dangerous ground. "If you are truly patriotic, you can't forget that they tried to keep the Anglo-Saxons off this very Trail with desperate determination and cunning. Think of how they jailed poor Lieutenant Pike and those twelve men under Baird and Chambers!"

Evelyn, who read her companion's thoughts cleverly enough, swung the bead chatelaine to and fro. "Oh, those old bickerings don't trouble me much. Besides, the Texans themselves were the very worst pirates ever known on prairie seas, weren't they? It's the poetry and pathos and grandeur of all this Southwestern country that thrills me—the colors of the rocks, the mystery, the tragedy. In Chicago I was smothered. Here I breathe—I live!" Her voice vibrated, and she drew in a long breath of the golden autumn sunshine as if she fed her soul on light and air.

Winthrop felt suddenly much older and stronger than she, as if he must guard her, protect her against herself and her emotions. She was so exquisitely sensitive and so finely strung—the type of glowing, tender, beauty-loving womanhood

which would unwittingly sacrifice itself to a clever appeal to sentiment and passion. He longed to gather the Navajo blanket and the sweet, rounded woman figure wrapped in its scarlet and blue folds, into his arms and shield them from possible danger and storm. But something—perhaps Evelyn's very enthusiasm—told him that not yet might he venture any demonstration of love. Instinctively he felt that to speak to her now would be to risk her refusal. Moreover he must retrieve the ground he had lost by his obvious doubt of her at Falls City. She had imposed a laughing penance which he must fulfill.

“I can't forget the danger you would have run, fifty—forty—even thirty years ago, picnicking here in the wilderness,” he said. “A woman in Apache-land!”

Evelyn nodded. “Yes, once I would have felt only the horror too. But now—I'm different. Your uncle will be back soon, Mr. Hammond. Let's finish this artistic hodge-podge.” She looked at him brightly.

“You don't care for the old notebook. I know I don't. I'll pitch the ‘copy’ into the valley there. Let's pow-wow!” He reached for the book, making a sudden motion with uplifted arm.

“Not care for your report? I adore it—when we're writing it up together,” she protested. “I have your career very much at heart.”

With her words ringing jubilantly in his ears, and hardly knowing what he did, Winthrop began

a series of unintelligible scrolls, dots, and dashes on a blank page.

Evelyn leaned toward his shoulder, and interrupted beseechingly. "Oh! What a jumble you are writing on that nice clean leaf!"

"Did you really mean it when you said you were interested in my career?" asked Winthrop suddenly, looking up into the face so close to him.

"Of course I did! I know you are going to do wonderful things——"

He began to write again. "You really think I'm going to amount to something, Miss Deering?"

She made a little dash at the pencil, ignoring his question. "I'd no idea collaboration admitted of so much discussion," she said evasively.

"Discussion?" he exclaimed, reluctantly taking the hint. "Why, joint authors are the most quarrelsome people on earth. One wants to put in this and the other insists on taking that out. One says the hero is tall and the other knows he's short. They're not on speaking terms at the end of the first chapter, and by the close of the book they're ready to murder each other."

"I've always heard that one did the work and the other had the credit." Evelyn laughed mischievously.

"Not in our case! I'll publish your photograph with this report, if you say the word. I'm proud to be associated with such genius. Really, we do work together pretty well, don't we?" He moved a little closer to her on the steamer rug.

"Do we?"

“ I believe I could write my dream novel, if I had you to help me! ” He spoke with conviction and sudden longing. But a slight motion of withdrawal on her part warned him, and he returned to the joint “ copy,” which, if not precisely suited to the columns of Knight’s papers, at least furnished an excellent excuse for intimate companionship. Presently he looked up, an unexpected gravity in his honest, blue eyes.

“ What you said about women and the Santa Fé Trail is true. All the most glorious achievements of the world have been due, one way or another, to the influence of—women like you. No, I don’t suppose that’s a particularly original remark. But when I am with you I seem to get some inkling of what the West really means—of a bigness that is grandly simple and direct. I may not be as keen as you are on its romance and its lights and shades, but as to its nobility I’m ready to be an awe-struck enthusiast.”

“ I knew you would like it,” said Evelyn sympathetically. “ One gets at the heart of life out here.”

“ That’s it. I remember once reading what some old wise chap said about simplicity—keeping clear of fashion and meanness and hurry, you know, in order to have an unobstructed vision for greatness! The West is the grandest thing I know, and I’d give a lot if I were honest and direct enough to understand it.”

There was a long pause, during which the two gazed out thoughtfully towards the snow-capped

mountains that loomed on the horizon like the shadowy wraiths of a heroic dream.

At last Evelyn drew a deep, ecstatic breath that was almost a sigh. "Sometimes I think that only the beautiful things are true," she said. "I wonder if the mountains and the glorious colors of the rocks of the Southwest, for instance, are not more real than the poverty and squalor of the cities."

"Perhaps," he said. "It would be a mighty fine world if beauty and simplicity were truth."

They were still sitting quietly together, looking out over the landscape, when Eastcott came slowly down the road. His hands were filled with maps and a writing pad. A pair of compasses straddled one ear for want of better accommodation, while a long, ivory ruler protruded boldly from his breast pocket. He wore a distinctly business-like air.

"Win's been telling you all the secrets of his trade, I suppose," said Eastcott to Evelyn as he stood over the pair on the rug and noticed the open notebook.

"On the contrary, he has been saying he wants to murder me!" laughed the girl, rallying from the seriousness of the mood into which she and her companion had fallen.

"You don't mean it? Infected with the spirit of the Trail, eh?"

"No, he has Collaborators' fever in the incipient stage. You'd better not come near or he'll stab you with a lead pencil."

“Horrible!” said Eastcott. “Is that Nell over there still asleep behind the bushes? Or has he finished her off with a dose of ink?”

At that instant there was perceptible a violent quiver of the black velvet “pumps” which protruded from behind the bushes, and a smothered, frightened cry disturbed the serenity of the mountain air.

“Let me go! Let me go! Oh, mercy! Mercy!”

Mrs. Eastcott’s head suddenly appeared above the branches. Her motor bonnet was pushed back from her tumbled hair, and one flushed cheek showed the impress of her own initials, suggesting that she had been subjected to some startling and unheard-of form of human torture. For a moment she stared about her in bewilderment. “Where am I?” she demanded of the group before her. Then she laughed shamefacedly, shook her heavy skirt into its usual trimness, and advanced to the steamer rug.

“I’ve had a perfectly terrible time,” she explained plaintively. “I’ve been dreaming an Apache——”

The other three broke into unsympathetic laughter.

“——An Apache was trying to scalp me. He was holding me by my coronation braid, and though I offered him my gold-fitted violet traveling bag—just as you have always suggested, Win—as a ransom for us all, he was swinging his knife over my head, when I screamed and woke.”

“He has branded you on the cheek, at any rate, so that he’ll know you next time,” said Winthrop with hard-hearted jocularly.

“He was a cowboy in disguise,” suggested Eastcott. “You’re labeled for the Eastcott Bar Ranch, my dear.”

Mrs. Eastcott hurriedly opened the elaborate hand-bag on which she had been sleeping in lieu of a pillow. “Oh, what a sight I am! Of course I forgot the monogram.” She thrust the dainty mirror back into its gaping receptacle with an expression of disgust, and rubbed her cheek with her handkerchief as the others laughed again.

McNulty, lounging in the automobile, roused himself slowly. His party were having a good time all right! If they knew all that he did, one of them at least might not be so jolly! He yawned and climbed slowly down to inspect the tires and to cast a proprietary eye over the car before getting under way. Only one tire gone to Kingdom Come so far! But it would be “pretty fierce” if another of the rubber shoes on the front wheels went to pieces on a pass like that! He gave one of the tires an admonitory dig with a prying tool.

Crack! A sound like a pistol shot rent the air and reverberated against the mountain walls, increasing in volume and then dying away in a distant canyon. The effect on the party was electrical. Mrs. Eastcott screamed, and Evelyn sprang to her feet. McNulty was bending over a flat

front tire and scratching the back of his head in grieved perplexity.

“Bust, sir, bust!” he exclaimed as Eastcott hurried forward. He touched the lame wheel tenderly as a surgeon handles a wounded patient. “Two front tires bust since Kansas City,” he continued lugubriously. “They hadn’t ought’er do that.”

Eastcott examined the injured part with interest.

“Humph! Thought those front tires would have gone through on New York air,” he said.

McNulty shook his head. He pried off the shoe, handling it with professional skill. Suddenly he exclaimed in surprise.

“See that patch?” He held up the tube. “Second-hand junk, sir!”

“What!” exclaimed Eastcott. “Everything on the car was new.”

“Sure thing!”

“Well?”

McNulty paused while he turned the tube around in his hands.

“Somebody’s monkeyed with the whole outfit along the road!” he announced emphatically. He cast the useless tube aside as if it had been a snake which he had cudgeled.

“You don’t mean to say that someone has stolen the good tires and substituted worn ones?” said Eastcott in amazement.

“That’s about the size of it, sir.”

“Absurd! We’ve not been among bandits or

highwaymen. The worst the natives do is to scratch their names on the paint." He glanced indifferently at the scores of penciled autographs which decorated the tonneau and bonnet.

"It's been done in a garage, I'll bet," said McNulty, fumbling with the water-proof wrappings of his extra tires. "Look at that, Mr. Eastcott! There's more old junk in place of my spares!" And he pulled back the cover, revealing two shabby, rubber casings.

Eastcott stared. He could hardly believe that he saw or heard aright. Then he glanced at the tires on the rear wheels. They were badly worn. If one should "go" here on the Pass——!

"Well, get out a new inner tube and fix us up so we can get down to Raton as soon as possible," he directed. "And don't let the ladies hear of this. We'll look into the matter by and by."

"But they've took my toobs," groaned McNulty.

"We've no inner tubes!" gasped Eastcott. "Why, man alive, we'll never get to Raton on the rim!"

"I had four in there," moaned McNulty, picking up the discarded tube. "But if you can give me half an hour, sir, I guess I can fix this jigger so we can manage to limp in them few miles."

He set to work with a professional air upon the flabby rubber in his hand.

Eastcott returned to the steamer rug with cheerful composure and the suggestion that a walk was in order while McNulty made repairs.

Around a turn in the road, the way led through a gate to a clearing in a dell not larger than a New England field. A small stream trickled past the wire fence. Here, in trim seclusion, stood a newly-built concrete residence. A few small, leafless trees flanked the building, and over the roof towered the distant, flat-topped mountain of Fisher's Peak. The new building was the phoenix that had arisen from the ashes of the adobe toll-house of that famous trapper, fighter, pioneer, and road-builder, "Uncle Dick Wootan."

In the days of caravans and mule-trains, "Uncle Dick" had been a compelling figure in the vanguard of civilization, a lonely sentinel on the watch towers of a race that, feeling its way to dominance, had spread itself over the realm of Aztec and Spaniard, with the irresistible sweep of a mighty inundation. He had set his modest little adobe hut amid the mountain solitudes, and there built a road across the Pass which threw open the route to the emigrant and to the big-wheeled caravans of the plains.

"I remember the old toll-house," said Eastcott reminiscently. "It was a very shabby affair—just a hut with a shed or two—but it must have been an oasis to the toiling mules and the men who had escaped from the Indians below. They say he built the road single-handed—cut out the hillsides, made the grades and bridges, blasted the ledges of rock, and cut down huge trees. For the life of me I don't understand how it was ever accomplished by a pioneer like 'Uncle Dick,'

whose true trapper instincts must have craved the solitude of the wilds. The real excitement of his undertaking began when he swung his toll-gate across the road at this very spot. I believe the old Trail passed in front of the house by that hitching post."

Eastcott was not far wrong. Many a Turpin of the road had thought he should be as free to travel over a well graded "pike" as he had been to follow an ordinary cow path. Some had tried to leap the toll-gate barrier; others had tried to tear it down; some had threatened to shoot the owner as he sat at his doorway thoughtfully smoking his old pipe. "Uncle Dick" wisely refrained from discussing the point with the Red-Skins, but gracefully threw open the gate to the chief and his bucks, and sometimes they had presented him with a buckskin or a buffalo hide. But the Mexicans had been the most difficult travelers. *Car-rambas!* The gate was to them anathema—a thinly veiled scheme for robbery of these free-born sons of the plains and mountains. The old man's hand had casually played along the barrel of his gun, and the spectacular, murmuring *caballeros* had finally—paid. When, later, the Knights of the Road passed that way "Uncle Dick," then the prosperous landlord of an official calling station for the stage coaches, had been obliged to play another part, rolling up his sleeves and wielding the napkin as skillfully as of old he had handled the gun. After the masked and light fingered gentry, having eaten hurriedly and

flung down their generous fees, had moved on to hold up the lumbering Concord stages, not infrequently it had happened that "Uncle Dick" served a second meal to weeping women and angry men whose empty pockets proved the success of the whilom guests' lawless raid.

But the adventurous days of the toll-gate and the adobe hut had long since been swept by the railroad into the scrap heap of memory.

"There used to be a locomotive pulling loads up over there,"—Eastcott pointed to the railroad track above—"which the Company baptized 'Dick Wootan.' It was the largest freight engine in the world when I came out here first. Its proud god-father lived to the good old age of ninety, and died a natural death—in spite of Mexicans and robbers."

"Makes a fine sequel," said Winthrop. "I'd like to have a piece of that old toll-gate to put up on my bookcase beside my bit of the University Fence."

When McNulty finally appeared with the "limping" automobile, Evelyn and Winthrop were gayly making a sketch of the imaginary toll-gate, fiercely besieged by highwaymen and Indians.

"This will make a thrilling illustration for the beginning of your next press letter," said Evelyn, putting heavy, dark eyebrows above the desperadoes' masks.

McNulty bent over confidentially toward Eastcott.

“ She’ll go with care, sir, till we get down to Raton, as long as we keep the tires cool.”

The descent of the Raton Pass on patched tubes and ragged tires was an adventure that Eastcott would have been glad to omit from his Transcontinental programme. He sat beside McNulty and nervously watched the road unroll itself downward before their cautious progress. In and out, round and round, wound the steep path, till the strongest tire might quail. Below, at the foot of the mountain, lay the vast plains of New Mexico and the traveler’s paradise of safety, Raton.

Both master and chauffeur breathed a sigh of relief when the automobile dipped into the valley at last without further mishap, and the dangerous journey was at an end. Almost imperceptibly had been wrought the change from the atmosphere of the States to the wild romance and languor of the Southwest.

In Raton, Eastcott found that another detail of the journey demanded his care. There was the camping outfit that had been expressed from New York and consigned to the safe keeping of the hotel until the arrival of the party. The unexpected addition of an extra passenger in the cramped space of the tonneau rendered the problem of making room for tents and cooking utensils somewhat serious. He wished now that he had had the load sent to Albuquerque instead of to Raton, and decided to give McNulty orders to have it dispatched by train at once.

At the shed adjoining the garage, where he had

been informed the outfit was stored, he found McNulty, in visible excitement and distress, standing over broken cases and loosened ropes.

“Have you seen the outfit, sir?”

“No,” said Eastcott. “What’s the matter with it?”

“Matter enough, sir! It’s in a fine fix—ropes cut, a big slit in one of the tents, and everybody as innocent as new-born babes! Don’t know nothin’—not they!” The chauffeur scowled vindictively. “Guess nobody knows a thing about them tires either!”

CHAPTER XI

MRS. EASTCOTT, as Evelyn had surmised, understood perfectly the nature of the scene she had interrupted in the palm-shaded corner of the ball-room at Kansas City. But it was part of her policy as Winthrop's aunt to outwardly ignore the pretensions of this unexpected rival; and she rather prided herself on the self-control which had overruled her feminine curiosity and sealed her lips against question or comment. At the same time the incident was one which she had not been able to forget, and which lent a preternatural eagerness to her maneuvers to further Winthrop's cause. Her nephew, not Santos, must win Evelyn's love. She was determined upon that, and not even her husband's laughing mockery of her match-making endeavors could change her purpose.

And yet she had to admit that she was woefully in the dark as to the exact situation between her champion and the object of his devotion, and she would have had some difficulty in analyzing even to her husband the result of her week's observations. Winthrop, she knew, had found Evelyn subtly changed since the previous summer, but the alteration, she felt confident, attracted rather than repelled. Mrs. Eastcott had her own

private ideas as to the reasons for this change, since she had not been blind to Señor Santos' compelling personality and the influence his emotional fervor and picturesqueness possessed over Evelyn; she herself, tried woman of the world and used to the manners of Italy and France, was not unmoved by his graceful medievalism. But she did not believe that Evelyn was as yet more than half in love with the Spaniard, though there was no doubt as to his regard for the beautiful American girl. Mrs. Eastcott, who, with the readiest will in the world, could hardly blame Santos, had great faith in the sturdy, wholesome attractiveness of her nephew, and the utmost confidence in her own knowledge of Cupid's world and her ability to take a hand at the steering wheel of the matrimonial car. The unexpected element of rivalry, however, had somewhat cramped her activities. She was consumed with the desire that Winthrop should at once propose to the girl, and yet the best she could do to further this work was to play a negative rôle which consisted chiefly of sleeping behind bushes and dozing in the tonneau in order that "Win and Evelyn" might enjoy each other's unchaperoned society.

From the first, her own ready sympathies had gone out to the girl with delighted admiration. Evelyn was beautiful, but beautiful with a richness and radiance that suggested an inner wealth and joyousness of soul. There was something exquisitely fresh and unspoiled—a sweet gayety—that touched the older woman's heart and made

her long almost as ardently as Winthrop for some enchantment to preserve that glowing life from care or storm. It was the yearning with which one strives to keep childhood glad, and when Winthrop had explained that Evelyn would be happier not to know that Señor Santos had introduced himself at Chicago, Mrs. Eastcott could only lift her eyebrows questioningly and hasten to acquiesce. Though her nephew had refused any explanation, and she wondered at the apparent mystery attaching to the trivial circumstance, she had loyally kept the secret for Evelyn's sake. She did not think that "Win" had managed his wooing thus far with any conspicuous brilliancy, but if ignorance was the price of Evelyn's joyousness, then Señor Santos and her nephew should be strangers as they were rivals.

As Mrs. Eastcott and Winthrop waited in the long parlor of the hotel for the rest of the party on the morning after their arrival in Raton, the chaperon studied the young man with undisguised interest.

Winthrop was standing by the window, his hands thrust into his trousers' pockets. His face wore a serious expression, and he looked determinedly out upon the street below. Mrs. Eastcott guessed that the instinct that prompts the ostrich to bury its head in the sand caused his glance to evade hers. She wondered if she dare advise him to speak to Evelyn at once. He might, in haughty man-fashion, resent her suggestion, and she was half doubtful, too, whether the moment was ripe

for the gathering of Evelyn's promise. Yet Raton was nearer Santa Fé than Kansas City had been, and Señor Santos was doubtless waiting at Santa Fé.

"Miss Deering is late this morning!" Mrs. Eastcott ventured carelessly at last.

At the sound of her voice her nephew turned slightly. "Yes," he answered.

"You and she have very congenial tastes, Win," she suggested, feeling bolder now that the ice was broken.

"Have we?" replied Winthrop, without betraying any encouraging emotion.

His aunt sighed. She wished he would be more communicative. "There are not many girls who would be able to work with you on your press dispatches."

Winthrop changed his position by shifting his weight from one foot to the other before replying. "I know that, Aunt Nell, of course."

"I think she admires you, Win, in spite of her laughing disapproval of your New England prosi-ness."

"Humph!" Winthrop shifted his Puritan avoirdupois to the other foot again restlessly, but made no further remark.

"You haven't—I suppose you've not yet——" Mrs. Eastcott began cautiously. She would have dearly loved to know just how matters stood between the pair. But she glanced at her companion's grave brow, and something in his silence warned her not to press the question. The situa-

tion amused while it annoyed her. The nephew, who in New York had been so frank in imparting news of his love affair, was hardly reconcilable with this strangely reserved and cautious young person who had the object of his affections within arm's reach. Love and the Tonneau did not appear to prosper so well together as the combination warranted.

“ Rather a languid morning, don't you think? ” she remarked artfully, breaking the pause.

Winthrop looked at her now in surprise. “ Gloriously invigorating, I had thought,” he said with a long breath. “ I never felt more like doing big things in my life! ”

Mrs. Eastcott brightened with involuntary satisfaction.

“ I feel—er—I suppose it's a headache,” she said vaguely, removing the gold top of a cut-glass smelling bottle. “ You can't count on me for much liveliness to-day, Win. You'll have to pack me up in my corner of the car and amuse yourselves.” She sniffed at the strong salts with a doleful air, half closing her eyes and contracting her brows in martyr-like suffering.

Her nephew was instantly touched. “ Poor Aunt Nell, you're such a trump of a traveler that it's a shame your first day in New Mexico should be spoiled! Perhaps breakfast—whatever has become of Miss Deering? ” He drew out his watch with undisguised impatience.

The words had scarcely died on his lips as

McNulty appeared abruptly in the doorway. Excitement was plainly written on his heated Hibernian features. His short hair was wet with perspiration, and he spoke hurriedly in breathless staccato, touching his cap mechanically as he caught sight of Mrs. Eastcott.

“ You’re to start at once, sir,” he said to Winthrop. “ Breakfast’s being packed in the car—ready in two minutes. Boss wants you in the garage.”

Mrs. Eastcott sprang to her feet in dismay, while Winthrop strode to the door as McNulty turned away. “ The deuce, man! What’s the matter? Quick! Out with it! ”

“ It’s—it’s Miss Deering, sir! ” The chauffeur brought out the words with panting reluctance. “ Boss will tell you. She’s gone! Two men hanging about—automobile! ” And without more ado he fled.

Mrs. Eastcott gave a little cry of horror. For a moment she thought she must faint. Then she gathered herself together with that sudden courageous self-possession that so often lies behind apparent feminine weakness.

“ Go! ” she said to Winthrop. “ Go to John! Don’t trouble about me! ”

But Winthrop stood as if paralyzed. As in a nightmare one tries to flee from some frightful danger, and cannot move, so he tried to run and stood rooted to the spot. Then something in his brain seemed to snap, and he dashed after McNulty in terrified foreboding. He did not see that his

aunt ran after him, still grasping the cut-glass bottle of smelling salts.

In the shed Eastcott was superintending hasty arrangements for an immediate departure. A number of men stood about talking excitedly, or rushed to and fro on distracted errands. McNulty was standing with outstretched, grimy hand, into which Eastcott laid bills and silver while he gave hurried directions.

“Put two more five-gallon cans on that old crock—we want all we can get!” He flung a small hamper, which a man handed him, to a shock-headed fellow in overalls. “That’s the breakfast stuff. Ah, Win, you’ve got the news? Are you all ready? Jove, man! don’t look like that! The girl’s not dead, you know!”

Winthrop’s face was pale and drawn; his lips twitched nervously, and his voice was thick and husky. “She’s gone? When? Where?”

“Saw her twenty minutes ago flying through town with two strange men in our car. She went for an early walk, someone says. They must have waylaid her.” Eastcott slipped into his automobile coat and drew on his gloves. “Ask McNulty. He’ll tell you. I’ve got to see the pilot. It won’t do to take chances on getting lost on a chase.”

“They’ve got twenty minutes start of us?” cried Winthrop suddenly in a strange, fierce voice. “Why in heaven are we standing here talking, then?” He leaped into the automobile and laid his hand on the wheel.

Then for the first time he noticed that the

machine which stood ready was not his uncle's touring car. This thing into which he had madly flung himself was a smaller affair, covered with mud and reeking with the smell of oil. It had no top and only apologies for cushions. A third person might be accommodated uncomfortably in a dirty rumble in the rear. Winthrop stared at the hamper already reposing on the floor-board, with dazed incredulity. Mrs. Eastcott, shivering with anxiety beside her husband, saw the young man's puzzled, hurried glance around the shed, and followed it with her own. The touring car was nowhere to be seen.

"They weren't no fellers as lives hereabouts," volunteered the man in overalls, answering Winthrop's glance. "I seen them come into town before you folks come, yesterday afternoon."

"I sure seen them givin' yer auto-mo-bile the honor of a close inspection in here last night with their dirty mits," said another.

"Seemed willin' enough to talk, betcher," added a third man as McNulty hastily cranked up the shabby machine.

"Sure thing," answered the chauffeur. "Come from Santa Fé, and goin' to pull out for Colorado to-day, they said. Wanted to know all about my car and where we was goin'. But I froze solid right enough, and they didn't learn much."

"Good fer you. I never seen such a back number of a 'rattle-trap,' driven to tarnation and caked with adobe juice solid till they played the

hose on the mud. The boys got jollyin' them about the looks, an' they said it was good enough for their purposes."

"Gee, but the whole outfit looked tough! Thinks I, 'Everythin's not O.K. here; them's the cusses what monkeyed with the outfit.' An' when I hiked down this A.M. to do a little Pinkerton work on them fellers, what did I see?" McNulty paused oracularly, out of breath with excitement and the sudden stream of his loquacity.

"He seen nothin'!" cried one of the bystanders to Winthrop. "No alkalis and no tourin' car! But he sees the bone-shaker here, an' he jumps in, an' raises the dust through the town. But nothin' doin'! So back he come, a-blazin' at the whole gang of us about cuttin' his tents an' losin' his car fer him, with the noo tires, an' he calls his boss, an' cuts loose on him, too."

Eastcott was speaking to his wife in low, hurried tones. The words came to Winthrop through the rough voices of the men around him as a clear note pierces a louder and more confused jargon. "You'll be all right, dear! You have plenty of money, and I've given McNulty enough to settle all bills. He will stay to help you about the luggage and things, and bring you on as soon as I telegraph. Yes, every town—I won't forget! No, I don't think she's in any real danger just yet, but those fellows have the better car, you know." Mrs. Eastcott was almost crying with distress.

"I was just a-tellin' Mr. Eastcott the whole

blamed business," explained McNulty, "when what should come tearin' along the road at a hot clip but my car headed west. 'It's them fellers and Miss Deerin',' yells the boss. An' Gee! if he didn't sure speak the truth——"

"All ready there!" called Eastcott, leaping into the seat beside Winthrop. The pilot climbed in behind. There was a sudden raucous, tearing sound of gears as the clutch was thrown in, and the car shot out of the open doorway with a jerk. The chase had begun.

A glorious morning had succeeded a splendid dawn, and a vigorous wind swept in from the prairies. The beauty of the day had already brought many people out of doors—visitors mostly from the raw climate of the north, who found Raton a Mecca for their physical ills. They looked askance as the noisy car rattled past.

There are mystics who believe that in sleep a man's soul leaves his body and flies untrammelled through space, even to the uttermost ends of the world. Those who have achieved a high state of development may look, unmoved, before they begin their flight, upon the empty earth-shell that, prostrate and with closed eyes, awaits the soul's return. Only those who still remain on the lowest of the spiritual planes are aware of any personal connection between themselves and the husk that, voiceless, speaks so poignantly of materiality and bondage. Winthrop's must have been a very modest spiritual development, for as the car left Raton for the open prairies, the lover was terribly

conscious of his anchorage to that Puritan earth-shell which bore his name and sat grim and silent beside Eastcott. Existence had become a nightmare, but his soul, which would have flown in a mad, wild rush to Evelyn, could not escape the claims of his materiality. He would have shaken himself free of flesh and bones, and he was relegated to the snail's pace of the stranger automobile. Never had he been so agonizingly conscious of his limitations. He hated his body as a great useless bulk that handicapped him unmercifully in this rescue for which he had been solely created. Feverishly he envied the prairie wind that leaped to meet him and could sweep over the earth as it listed. He thought fiercely of birds and antelopes. Only man, the masterpiece of creation, was shackled and forbidden speed and freedom. His nerves quivered with a fury of impatience and desire. He clenched his hands, and his nails made deep, angry marks on the tanned skin.

In the open country wheel marks along the Trail were plainly visible. Eastcott and the pilot, scrutinizing the fresh imprints, as pioneers of old had questioned footprints for traces of Apaches and Comanches, were in no doubt that they were following the tracks of an automobile. The stolen car had been headed round the base of the mountain, and had then swung west and south to join the railroad near the town of Springer.

The "coffee mill" was running with all the speed its kind may achieve, along the natural prairie roads. Telegraph poles stretched in unin-

interrupted lines to a meeting point in the distance, beyond which a single dark thread wound onward till space swallowed up the slender, hair-like testimony to man's existence, and the prairies were left to a vast engulfing loneliness, broken only at rare intervals by the infinitesimal, crawling outlines of a far-off train. This was the true Indian country of almost limitless horizon, a country roamed of old by countless herds of buffalo—the Red Man's cattle—and made terrible by the marauding Apache and Comanche. Winthrop, contemplating these lonely flats, picturesque only in their historic associations, wondered how it would ever be possible to discover his lost love in that infinite and desolate expanse.

Eastcott sat at the wheel, his lips apart as if he were helping the miserable and sorely tried little car to devour the distance. "They must have been going at a fine clip," he said at last, nodding at the road.

The tracks of the other car were more distinct now, owing to the softer nature of the prairie roads; and Winthrop scanned them silently. Then he said in a low, strained voice, as if his throat were parched: "They had a long start. Do you think we can catch them?"

"I can let her out a bit more, I think. The roads are smooth enough, and the carburetor's working well," said Eastcott, accepting the hint.

"Wouldn't take any chances, sir," admonished the pilot from the rumble, where he had already been jerked about unceremoniously. "Begin to

strike it rather bad somewheres along here in spite of the looks. It's jumpy country—little done to the old cow path since the Apaches went out of business."

Winthrop thought, with a sudden rush of pain, of the danger to which the pace of the touring car was exposing Evelyn. He fancied her tossed to and fro in the flying machine, now thrown against the low door, now hurled against the cushions. He could picture the felt hat, with the scarlet scarf all askew over the lovely, wavy hair, and the beautiful rounded cheeks pale above the Navajo blanket. Then he told himself that Evelyn was brave, with patrician blood in her veins that would not let her quail or weep, as another woman might have done. He would be willing to stake his life on the assurance that she bore herself with outward spirit and courage. The thought comforted him while it made his heart ache with a wild yearning to take her in his arms and protect her from that before which she was too proud to tremble.

"They're taking desperate chances," said Eastcott grimly.

"Takin' chances is in their line, I reckon. They've cottoned on to the chase, I figger. They'd hear this durned old plug of a cayuse twenty mile off." The pilot clung desperately to the rumble.

The high-pitched voice of the Westerner came to Winthrop spasmodically as the buffeting wind tugged at his motor cap viciously and whipped

his long ulster as if it were a loose sail. The day before, with Evelyn beside him, he had greeted the wind as a friendly, mischievous rogue who played pranks with the flying car out of joyous fun. The sun had gazed down benignantly. The mountains had stood guard in the distance, purple and azure barriers against all that was unlovely or small or mean. Nature had befriended him; everything had smiled. It had been easy to believe that Evelyn was right when she said that only Beauty was Truth. But to-day the world was suddenly ugly, and Nature an enemy that did its worst to get the better of Man. The sun looked down scornfully, and sneered at the foolish little ant-men scurrying helplessly to and fro on ant errands at which the gods might laugh. The mountains were sinister and forbidding.

“Never seen fairer tracks,” commented the pilot when once the car pulled up for further investigations and adjustments, “though I ain’t done scout duty since General Crook’s days. They’re keepin’ to the Old Trail to Santa Fé.”

“Then they’re headed straight for Wagon Mound and Las Vegas?” questioned Eastcott.

“It’s sure that they’re hittin’ the Old Trail,” answered the scout cautiously. “Anything beyond that’s not safe guessin’. Las Vegas’s a matter of fifty mile, but the trails lead off right and left. Mebbe they’ll make for the canyons along the Mora River over to the left. They’d be safe there if they’re aimin’ to cut loose from human society, I reckon.”

Winthrop looked at the man over his shoulder as they started ahead again. The pilot was a raw-boned, square-jawed fellow, sixty years old, with bushy gray eyebrows that met over a pair of shrewd, narrowed eyes. His keen, far-off look seemed to be eternally grappling with distances. For all his external roughness, Winthrop was conscious of something kindly and rudely sympathetic that made the Westerner not a bad traveling companion on a chase for a beautiful girl who needed shrewdness and determination to rescue her from her present predicament.

“What’s their game, do you think?” he asked the pilot.

The man shook his head in time to the motion of the car. “Search me!” he said noncommittally. “It may be cold cash an’ mebbe it’s just deviltry. It’s an Injun’s game more’n a white man’s, anyway! Stealin’ gals is worse’n hoss rustlin’. There ain’t no law hard enough to hand ’em out all that’s comin’ to ’em, an’ there ain’t enough pain in all their hide to make ’em suffer enough.”

Winthrop hardly heard the answer to his question. Looking thus over his shoulder he had caught a view of the mountains where only a day before he and Evelyn had sat together. How little either of them had thought then that they were destined to cross these plains apart, in distress and pain!

Suddenly the old scout started up, pointing in the direction that the car was going. “Look!

Look! If it ain't them alkalis, I'll be scalped alive! "

Winthrop tried to scramble to his feet, swaying dangerously in the narrow space. A small black object could be seen almost on the horizon line. He strained his eyes desperately. The pilot was shading his eyes from the sun and peering steadily ahead. " Careful, boss, careful! Thar's a durned bad bumper right thar. I'll be tomahawked if this ain't better'n chasin' Injuns! "

" It looks like a herder's chuck wagon," said Winthrop disappointedly. Through the field glasses he could see distinct signs of a cattle herd, spread like a dirty brown carpet over the distant prairie, and it seemed to his nervous gaze that the dark object was stationary in the warm bath of the New Mexican sun. He thrust the glass into the pilot's hand.

" Gosh! if I don't think they're stuck," shouted the Westerner, " stuck in a sink or a stony wash, mebbe ten miles ahead."

" They'll get away," exclaimed Eastcott despairingly, " if I can't get more pace out of this tub. She won't even keep up a steady twenty! "

" How about the telegraph? " asked Winthrop desperately, looking at the interminable poles so utterly useless in this emergency of the plains. " Can't we have them stopped? " He felt like racing on foot along the Trail in his impatience.

" That's an idea," said the scout. " Trail follows the railroad most up to Wagon Mound. We can pull out for Nolan over there, and have 'em

held up before makin' Wagon Mound if we're not pumpin' lead into 'em before that."

The car plowed steadily on, its wheezy engines proclaiming their protest in a loud, persistent rattle that threatened immediate dissolution. Eastcott knew that there was a limit to the "coffee mill's" possibilities. But the carburetor was working well, and the tires were still sound. If only some vital part did not work loose, there might be a chance yet of reaching the car ahead.

CHAPTER XII

THE Raton Mountains had faded to a blurred mass of brown in the distance, and on the right the far-off peaks loomed, like huge shadows, threatening and cold. The road, as the pilot had predicted, had become suddenly rough and uneven. Here and there irrigating ditches from the neighboring farms and ranches crossed the path, jolting the excited travelers unmercifully. Often these ditches lacked bridges, and their crossing was rendered the more difficult from the fact that the adobe clay on both sides was saturated for some feet with water. Now and again, ranch and farm reservations had boldly crossed the Trail irrespective of common rights, and innumerable gates in the wire fences cruelly delayed the progress of the panting car. A dozen times Winthrop, cursing under his breath the selfishness that obstructed the highway, jumped down to fling wide the unfriendly barriers. He was not surprised that the party soon entirely lost sight of the distant object they had taken for the other automobile.

It seemed hours before a railroad station came into view—a bare, isolated little building, conveying a strange and oppressive sense of desolation and of abandonment by the civilization, which had produced it, to the coyotes and the immeasurable

wilderness. A man lazily greeted the strangers as if he were too much accustomed to his lonely vigil to feel any pleasure in this momentary companionship of his fellowmen.

Yes, another "kyar" had passed that way, he said, and had "hit such a pace" that his "hair had riz straight up." Where was it goin'? Well, he "guessed it was pullin' out for Wagon Mound."

"How long ago?" asked Eastcott sharply.

The man walked leisurely into the station house and gazed ruminatively at the clock while Winthrop, who followed at his heels, stood over him as though about to wring the information out of him by force.

"I guess it was somewheres in the neighborhood of half an hour. Mebbe it was less."

Half an hour! That meant at least fifteen miles start of them! Winthrop groaned.

"Tell me, quick—was there a lady with them?"

The man took a long breath, as if he had not yet had time to recover from the last inquiry and was dully resentful that anyone should expect him to supply information at such hot speed. He eyed his questioners stolidly from pale eyes, out of which the prairie suns had washed not only color but hope and enthusiasm as well. The law of the wilderness which knows naught of hurry or excitement was upon him. All his sensibilities had become dulled, like his eyes, by long contact with these lonely wastes where nothing happened, and where he had no companionship but that of the

sky, the barbed wire fences and the skulking coyotes.

He answered Winthrop's query with irritating and leisurely calm. "Sure! A-sittin' all alone."

"Get this wire off at once, then," cried Eastcott. "Tell them to stop that car at Wagon Mound." He half dragged, half coaxed the man to the telegraph desk. "We've got to catch those fellows. They stole the car, and they're running off with the lady."

"No?" exclaimed the man, settling himself before the instrument. "You—don't—say—so? Now, what d'ye think of that?"

He set the keys in motion, and spelled out, with painful deliberation, the message which Eastcott flung down before him. It seemed hours to Winthrop before the answering click came. The operator watched the tell-tale needle.

"What does it say?" asked Winthrop.

The man wrote slowly, in a scratchy hand, on a rag of a paper slip. Gradually the words came into sight. "Automobile passing through here now."

"Stop it!" cried Eastcott, the instant he seized the import of the words. "Stop it, I say!"

The operator bent to his work as if the words had electrified him as well as the instrument.

Once more the needle began to tick its message. "Car gone through." The man told off the words this time instead of writing them down. "Chasing after it. Will telegraph stop car Watrous if passes that way."

Winthrop groaned again; Eastcott and the pilot looked at one another blankly. Watrous was twenty-five miles beyond Wagon Mound. The road left the railroad for the greater part of the way, and a dozen trails led off from the main route. No sheriff's posse could be obtained before reaching Las Vegas, twenty miles beyond Watrous, and there was every reason to suppose that even if the thieves did not prefer one of the side trails, they would avoid that well populated center.

"The only thing that's sure," said Eastcott, "is that they now know we're on their tracks, and they'll make every effort to get away." He turned to the operator, who was already threatening to lapse back into his former inertia. "Wire Las Vegas to hold up the car."

The pilot and Winthrop were already in the "coffee mill" when Eastcott hastily climbed into the driver's seat. "The gasoline will hold out a good many miles yet," he said with grim satisfaction, "but for caution's sake we'll have to take on some more at Wagon Mound. Those Knights of the Road can't go on forever, I suppose, and they'll have small chance of getting any fuel now that the whole route has been alarmed."

"They must have started with enough 'gas' to cover two hundred miles at least," said Winthrop.

"And probably filled up somewhere before we gave the alarm," added Eastcott mournfully.

“Meanwhile,” suggested the pilot from his seat in the rumble, casting a friendly eye upon the hamper, which had lain so long unheeded, “we’d best make a chuck-wagon of this kyar. What do you say, Boss? I’m holler as a drum.”

The heat of the chase and the conflicting passions which had held Winthrop in their thrall ever since the early morning, had taken away all sense of hunger. Now, however, a ravenous appetite suddenly seized him, and remembering for the first time that he had had no breakfast, he took the sandwiches eagerly, and ate rapidly.

“It’s only the Apache as can live off thin air, lopin’ along from Uncle Sam,” said the pilot with a mouth full of chicken. “I reckon them fellows on that other kyar are not wastin’ any time in restaurants.”

The “coffee mill” had now pantingly arrived at a brown, streaked gully, where lay the litter of centuries of natural stone wreckage, torn and wrenched from the earth by the waters in savage exultation long before mankind had contested their mighty sovereignty of the world. The history of the ages was written on these Tablets of Time in seams and scars, dust and grime. The wheezing car had no more link with them than the pyramids with the tourists who clamber officiously up their haughty sides. Something in the visible signs of Nature’s violent forces made Winthrop seem suddenly puny and puerile in his own eyes. He had entered a country where Nature and Man were laws unto themselves.

All at once he felt miraculously strong to avenge himself on the abductors. He looked at the wreckage of the gully, and understood the seething, unbridled passion of the vanished waters.

The road had suddenly ended in a dry wash which had once been the broad, shallow bed of a river and the mad course of countless freshets. Its path was marred by ragged, dusty banks and by the huge boulders and stones which lay along the bed as far as the eye could reach. The car picked its way joltingly over the stones until the wheels felt once more the smooth, prairie road on the opposite bank.

This then was the West, of which he had dreamed, thought Winthrop bitterly—the West of whose nobility he had only yesterday prated, and which to-day shut him in a living death by its very immensity and loneliness. A dip in the ground and he was entombed for all time; a rise, and he had emerged again into that solitude bounded by the distant hills. He had fancied the prairie fit symbol of a country which stretched out its arms to embrace the children of every nationality and creed. “Room for all on my broad bosom,” had been the imagined cry of what now proved but the sterile wastes of a dead and abandoned planet, where the ruts in the Trail before him were the petrifications of an activity long since exhausted. Except for that sense of fierce strength that thrilled through him—a force as unrestrained as Nature’s own—he might have be-

lieved that he, too, was hardened into some fantastic, horrible image of a prehistoric creation.

The minutes that passed in the slow advance dragged like hours, and the hours appeared to lengthen into days, before the party caught sight at last of the rocky mesa and the adobe huts and houses of Wagon Mound. To the left of the high plateau, curved to the shape of an army wagon, the hills had sent out rows of green-clothed skirmishers, and far to the right a blue haze hung over the huge, shadowy forms of the mountains. But Wagon Mound was still five miles away.

“There ain’t no place of gorier memories on the whole Santa Fé Trail, not barrin’ Pawnee Rock nor Cow Creek,” boasted the old scout proudly, looking up at the long hump on the mountain which had given a name to the town.

Now, without warning, the trail of the escaping automobile left the road and cut boldly across the open prairie. Eastcott brought his machine to an abrupt stop, and the three men stared first at the wheel ruts and then at each other.

“They’ve certainly seen us and are trying to take a short cut,” cried Winthrop. “Oh! give her her head, Uncle!” he added impatiently.

“Guess we can go wherever they can,” said Eastcott as he grasped the lever; “but I don’t like it. It’s dangerous business, leaving the road, poor as it is.”

Without any more words he turned the car across the prairie. There was no chance for con-

versation now, for the bumping and jolting rendered all three speechless in the effort to hold on. Presently, and apparently without premeditation, the trail plunged headlong into a deep, sinister arroyo. Traces of wheel ruts were plainly visible, and Eastcott cautiously dipped the car on a slant into the depths of the washout before the pilot could protest. But once below the level of the prairie, it became evident to the travelers that there was no rise on the opposite bank to correspond with the slope over which the car had descended. Eastcott maneuvered desperately along the course of the arroyo-bed in the hope of finding some chance for escape, but the grade was beyond the limited power of the engines. The car was effectually caught in a trap of its own seeking. Winthrop and the pilot sprang down.

“Them alkali chaps was here all right,” said the pilot cheerfully, as if he would offer some measure of consolation.

“I suppose this was where we saw the car,” answered Eastcott. “It had pulled up at the edge to inspect and make sure of the chance of getting through. It must have been down in here a good half hour to judge by the evidence of shoveling and constant backing and bucking at the upgrade.”

He set the machine at the bank in a wild attempt to climb to the prairie level, but the wheels could get no grip, and though he repeated the effort several times the car always rolled hopelessly back.

“It’s no use, Boss,” said the pilot at last. “This thing ain’t got nothin’ but one-dog power, an’ we’ve got to dig fer it to get out. Lucky you was smart enough to bring shovels and that tackle there.”

Winthrop, climbing on foot with the others to the top of the bank which the car had refused, set himself stoically to the task of leveling the steep grade. At another time he would have enjoyed the adventure, but to-day the work of digging within the confined space of the arroyo served to add to his sensation of a living burial in this bare, unfriendly country. Evelyn had made much of its romance; there was none in it for him. She had promised to teach him to love New Mexico, and on this, his first day in the world she had talked of so often, he was digging his way laboriously to her rescue. With the thought, however, of her promise came the remembrance of her as she had looked yesterday, seated on the steamer rug and writing industriously, with a pretty, important little frown on her brow, in his commonplace, old notebook. As he threw out shovelful after shovelful of the hateful, obstructing earth, every trick of her “collaboration” was recalled to his mind. He saw the little hand that flew over the cheap paper; he saw the pencils with which he had supplied her—pencils that her vigorous outpourings of inspiration had repeatedly dulled; and which he had sharpened to make them a match for her wit. He thought of her fanciful “copy,” and he remembered that his own writing



“The trail plunged headlong into a deep, sinister arroyo.”

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had suddenly seemed but the lucubrations of a back garret on Grub Street. The notebook was still in his pocket; but he had lost the active partner of his professional career.

The week that he and Evelyn had spent together along the Santa Fé Trail had brought them very close to each other's sympathies, yet even though he had been blessed with more of her society than he had ever previously enjoyed, like many another brave man he trembled before a woman, lest he lose the little of interest and friendliness he had already won. Santos and Kansas City—Santos and Santa Fé—all had seemed infinitely remote while Evelyn was at his side. Now, however, that she was absent, he suddenly realized that the New Mexican had, in every probability, employed the last week to gather all his forces at Santa Fé in order to capture the feminine citadel before the eyes of an outwitted rival. The thought lent a kind of fury to the speed with which Winthrop worked, till the others looked from their own labors almost admiringly. Up to the present moment all his rage had been directed against the kidnappers who had deprived him of his treasure; now he was equally infuriated by the picture of Santos, who strove to accomplish the same end.

An hour had passed, and still the car was hopelessly buried within the frowning banks of the arroyo. Winthrop looked at his watch; it was already close upon half-past three o'clock. The "coffee mill" might be imprisoned ages in this infernal trap. If only a team of horses could be

procured it might easily be pulled out of its prison. Near at hand he caught sight of a coyote skulking in the shelter of the underbrush, its devilish, cunning eyes under wrinkled brows bent upon the man for a moment ere it took to ignominious flight. Winthrop longed to wreak his vengeance upon it as the evil spirit of those monotonous plains.

His mind was made up. He threw down his shovel, and turned to his uncle. "What do you say to my making a bee line for Wagon Mound and getting a team there to pull us out?"

Eastcott paused in his digging and turned a perspiring face to his nephew. "This is a two hour job," he said rather lugubriously, "and every moment's precious."

"I could not only get a team, but could bring news."

Eastcott's face was no less careworn and anxious than his nephew's. The loss of the touring car meant the entire abandonment of the Transcontinental journey. To have come thus far and then to have to admit failure through no fault of his own was a disaster which Eastcott could not bear to consider. "Very well! Anything that will bring us even with these wretches," he said.

Winthrop threw on his coat, and seized one of the brace of revolvers. Then he set off at a run towards the town. The air blew brisk and keen, and for some time he kept up a steady trot, finally settling down to a brisk walk. He hoped to make the settlement within three quarters of an hour,

and with a good team of horses to pull, there was no reason why the "coffee mill" should not be out of the arroyo within a little over an hour. He must get some gasoline also, sufficient for an indefinite run, for he felt confident that if necessary his uncle would not hesitate to run the car throughout the night.

Breathless and hot, Winthrop arrived at the shabby conglomeration of houses grouped around what was once the Mexican Custom House of Wagon Mound, and flanked by two rounded elevations. A small hotel, of Western limitations as to comfort, regarded him from its shabby windows, but even with its uninviting exterior it was an oasis in his wilderness.

Under the porch a man stood in his shirt sleeves, staring with unfeigned surprise as though Winthrop had dropped into his uneventful world out of the blue sky above. His custom was usually drawn from the infrequent, incoming trains, and this lonely, hurrying traveler excited his curiosity.

Winthrop hastily delivered his message, and having received the assurance that a team would immediately set out for the arroyo, he rushed off to the railroad station. The telegraph operator, of course, was familiar with the circumstance of the runaway car, as indeed was the whole town, judging from the crowd of nondescripts which flocked around the door as Winthrop stood there. Since the days when the renowned Hatcher and fifteen men of his caravan outfit had strategically

held up three hundred blood-thirsty Apaches, nothing so thrilling in the way of local excitement had apparently come to Wagon Mound.

The telegraph operator, in the midst of this happy family party, developed a vast enthusiasm for Winthrop's interest, keeping one eye on his interlocutor while the other sought applause from the crowd of humanity outside.

"We wired Las Vegas all right," said the operator, "and we called up Watrous, a matter of twenty mile from here, and no one's seen or heard o' the dog-gone fellers since they passed through here."

"Not reached Watrous!" exclaimed Winthrop.

"No, siree; you can bet your bottom dollar on that! And if they do try to get through between now and sundown they'll find the boys waiting for them with as nice a little obstruction stretched across the street as they ever see. If that *auto-mo-bile's* not an *er-o-plane*, they're nabbed, sure."

"Then they've jumped the Trail somewhere between here and Watrous, you think?"

"Can't say, sir. You can figger it out as you like. Thought's free. It's a pretty rough trail along that stretch,—runs through the Dog Canyon and crosses some tough looking arroyos like the one you say you folks is stuck in."

"Could they get anywhere if they left the Trail?"

"You're right among the hills, and if them fellows choose, you could no more find them than you could a coyote in sagebrush. If those fellows

have been doing a bit of rustlin' there's no knowing where they'll jump. There's a mighty lot of creeks and canyons along the Mora River, an' trails running into them from every point of the compass."

Winthrop was as white as a sheet. The hopelessness of the search swept over him, and he felt suddenly struck into abject helplessness. He staggered against an upturned packing case and sat down, drawing his breath in short gasps. "Something's got to be done," he panted; "and that quickly. What do you advise?"

The man looked puzzled. Winthrop's manner vaguely distressed him, and he seemed anxious to help.

"Might organize a gang to go along the tracks and do a bit of searching; but it wouldn't do much good. The trails are several miles apart a little ways out of this town, and there ain't much to see, skin your eyes as you like. It's all up and down country."

"Suppose they've broken down somewhere along the route," suggested Winthrop, clinging to this last straw. "The lady must be rescued. It would be horrible for her to be out there all night."

The man got up and walked to the door; he was thinking hard. He turned to Winthrop and touched him, with a friendly hand, on the shoulder.

"There ain't no sheriff's outfit this side of Las Vegas, but the boys have got the whole story down there, and you've only got to give the word

and they'll send an outfit down here to search the trails. Guess they're watching out, now, this side of Las Vegas. Watrous ain't much of a place, but you might go on there and tell your party to come along and meet you on the Trail. You could get a feller or two to walk back out of Watrous, so that if them horse thieves come that way, you might trap 'em yourself and have your party come along as reserves. See? "

To Winthrop the man's suggestion seemed plausible. It was a good enough chance to take, and the prospect of being the actual rescuer of Evelyn and the first to reach her fired his blood and stimulated his imagination. The adventure might be a desperate one, but Evelyn's case, so far as he knew, was even more desperate. He instantly made up his mind to follow the man's plan.

" There's a freight train out o' Wagon Mound due here in five minutes. Send back word to your friends by the team to come on through here and follow you up along the route to Watrous."

Five minutes later, Winthrop was standing on one of the trucks of a freight train bound for Watrous.

For some distance road and rail ran parallel, then the Trail scurried away to the right along the slopes of the foothills, beyond which lay the higher elevations of the Turkey Mountains and the flat top of an extinct crater. It was a wild and rugged country, intersected by a picturesque valley through which the River Mora flowed from

some distant canyon wrapped in the purple embrace of the hills. The railroad crossed and recrossed the winding course of the river as if the two played a never-ending game of hide and seek; as the train pulled up at Watrous a few straggling houses came into view.

The man in charge at the station met Winthrop's inquiries with a smile. He had just heard from Wagon Mound over the wires, and a couple of train hands had already offered to accompany the stranger in the search for the thieves.

It was already the "shank of the afternoon," as his companions remarked, when Winthrop set out with the station hands, and the consciousness that in less than an hour darkness would set in, lent wings to the feet of all three. The guides were young men of the rough type to which any adventure that promises good pay appeals, and they told him eagerly that the Trail led past a lake and then north across Wolf Creek to the Dog Canyon, a distance of some six miles from the starting point. By the time that the walkers reached the canyon, Eastcott and the pilot, given a fair trail and no mishaps, ought to be in sight. They would naturally come along slowly in order to thoroughly search the road; but the importance of exploring its whole length, before the quick-falling darkness set in, could not be overestimated.

Winthrop walked on swiftly, his eyes sternly fixed on the ruts in the Trail; but there was no indication that the stolen car had passed that

way. A short distance beyond Wolf Creek the road forked and led away into the mountains. The light was already growing dim, and he examined the Trail which led to the Dog Canyon and Wagon Mound with the feeling that the night was in league with the thieves. Had the car passed and made the turn to the right, there would surely have been signs of the rubber wheel tracks on the sharp curve. But there was not a spoor, and he pushed on again with a sigh of relief, his companions lagging slightly behind.

It had been days since Winthrop had had the opportunity to stretch his limbs, but the fear of losing Evelyn in one of those dark, mysterious canyons—houses of the ghosts, the Indians had called them—which now began to hem him in gave him power and endurance. Again that fierce sensation of strength, like the violent force of a resistless torrent, rushed over him.

Gradually the blue haze which hung on the hills deepened into purple shadows. Then the color died out of the mists, leaving the mountains dark wraiths and black, blurred outlines against a gloomy sky. It would be a couple of hours before the moon rose. Several times Winthrop stopped to place his ear close to the ground, after the fashion of Indians on the war path. He longed for the honk of a motor horn or the chug-chug of the old machine which Eastcott was guiding along the Trail. But nothing broke the silence save the cry of a bird, or the dismal howl of a coyote that prowled in the deepening night. There

was nothing to indicate the neighborhood of human friends or foes.

Presently, there came a dip in the road, and ahead, through the gloom, Winthrop could distinguish the outlines of a great opening in the earth. The path appeared to drop into a monster arroyo, the windings of which hid the shadowy course of the Trail behind a dark bluff that stood like a hideous giant ready to devour all that passed.

“Dog Canyon,” explained one of the men. “Road’s been engineered right through. We’ve only got to follow it. Leads out to the other side.”

Winthrop surveyed with dismay the abysmal-like opening of the canyon, whose proportions were exaggerated by the prevailing gloom. Then he started down the plunge of the path. He could still faintly see the Trail, but it was already too dark to search for the imprint of rubber tires.

Suddenly, one of the men touched him on the shoulder, and pointed silently into the darkness at their feet. But to the Easterner’s duller senses there was neither sight nor sound.

“Listen!” whispered the man hoarsely. “There’s something moving.”

He crept noiselessly forward, and Winthrop and the other followed him cautiously, straining their ears. They moved on thus several seconds, passing round a bend in the lower part of the road. Then, suddenly, a light flickered in the depths to their right, and fluttered out again. It had been

a mere pin point of luminous, glittering gold, but it had been sufficient to show Winthrop something stirring in the darkness. Then a voice reached him—a man's—and there was the unmistakable sound of the cranking-up of an automobile.

“They're there!” he whispered excitedly. “Hold the road and don't let a soul pass. I'll whistle if they try to make a dash for it!” Unconsciously he had resumed his leadership.

The road had been cut out of the slant of the canyon, and wound downward in easy grades. Winthrop crept along in the shadow of the friendly rocks. What had happened to the thieves? Were they here in hiding? Was Evelyn with them? Had an accident stalled them on the Trail, leaving them helpless to move one way or the other until they had completed repairs? Winthrop gripped his revolver and crept nearer.

Then, of a sudden, his blood froze within his veins. The sharp cry of a woman smote his ears.

Instantly, from below, there was a muffled shout, and he heard the rush of a woman's skirts, and a breathless, panting gasp. At the same moment the distant call of a siren cut through the blackness, and a woman rushed towards him.

He burst from his cover with a long, warning shout. There was an answering cry from the throats of the train hands above, and a scream, half of joy and half of fright, as the woman fell on her knees.

Evelyn was at his feet!

Before he could stoop to her, two shadowy fig-

ures fled along the bed of the creek, and he fired in their direction blindly, madly. The call of the siren rang again weirdly through the night, and he called to the train men excitedly to make a rush for the stolen car. Then he bent his strong arms, and drew Evelyn up to him until even in the darkness she looked like one of the clinging figures of Niobe's tragic, terrified daughters.

He spoke to her, calling her tenderly by name. He drew her closer, and pressed his hot cheek into the tangle of her hair.

She opened her eyes and gave a little, yearning cry.

Again he called to her. She looked at him in the darkness and smiled. "Winthrop," trembled on her lips.

Then she threw her arms wide, and he bent low and kissed her as she sobbed.

CHAPTER XIII

As Winthrop held Evelyn in that fervid clasp, he was conscious of nothing but her presence—of that exquisite, tumultuous assurance that she was there, safe within his arms. Twice he had lost her and twice he had found her! Thus would he hold her forever now, lest again Fate snatch her from his side. He had boldly called her name, and she had answered with his own; his cheek had pressed hers, smooth as a pansy's velvet petal and warm as a summer night; his lips had drunk the wine of life.

Behind the veil of the night lay a world, compared with which he and she were but the flutter of a moth's wing across the scheme of the Universe and Time. Yet unreasoningly he knew it was no mere chance that had made him the instrument of her rescue—that all his life had been a preparation for an event as inevitable as the slow progress of the glaciers or the rush of the vanished waters which had cut the canyon through the hills.

While Evelyn still sobbed in his arms, a dark shadow flung itself out of the gloom and stumbled against him. Then a man's voice broke the spell.

“There's a car down there in the draw, an’

another comin'. The greasers have skidooed along the creek."

Evelyn started away from Winthrop's clasp, struggling to rise. As he helped her to her feet, a light flashed on the road somewhere in the darkness far ahead, and again a siren called. Winthrop raised his voice impulsively and shouted into the night. The light disappeared.

"It's my uncle," he explained hurriedly to Evelyn. "He is coming to meet us along the Trail in the car those scoundrels left at Raton." He led her gently to the deserted automobile, which was drawn up close to the shelter of a rock. The lights were out and the engines silent. He pressed the bulb of the motor-horn vigorously to answer the call of the siren.

Out of the black void came the voice of the scout, shrill and penetrating as an Indian's. Then clearly, but still from afar, Winthrop heard the sound of his own name, and the "train hands" shouted with all the force of their lungs. He made a motion to assist Evelyn into the tonneau, but she clung to him in distress.

"Oh, don't, don't!" she sobbed hysterically. "I'm afraid to sit in there again."

He reassured her in slow, even tones, purposely calm.

"Very well—you shall not unless you wish. But there's nothing more to fear—the men have gone."

"How—how did you know where to find me?" she asked.

“ McNulty saw the car pass through Raton this morning, with you and two strange fellows, and we thought there was something wrong. So we followed as fast as we could with the old cripple of a machine which they left behind.” He could not see her face except where its whiteness shone dim and ghost-like in the gloom. “ We should have caught up with you before, but we had several mishaps and stuck—it seemed for ages—in a deep arroyo.”

“ I remember the arroyo,” she said plaintively. “ That is where I tried to send you a thought-message, that—that—— They said they were taking me to Las Vegas—to him.”

Winthrop tried to soothe her, as she still clung to him for support. But he was bewildered by her words, and he knew that even in the shadows his surprise betrayed itself. “ To him? ” he repeated blankly.

“ Yes—to Father! He was ill—he is ill. They said they told you. Oh, we must hurry to Las Vegas at once—at once, Winthrop! We must not stop here. He is suffering. We were going very fast when something happened to the car and we were held in this dreadful canyon—hours and hours, it seemed.” She started forward impulsively with the remembrance. “ They said Las Vegas was not far. Then the darkness came on, and they were—harsh to me. I was afraid of them, and I ran—ran for Las Vegas.”

The “ chug-chug ” of the approaching car broke in upon her words. Then there was a sharp, loud

“rap-rap-rap,” like the din of a Gatling gun. The light reappeared at a lower level just ahead—a giant glow-worm illuminating the roadway.

“Your father? Ill?” repeated Winthrop in amazement.

“Yes! Yes! You did not know?” She put her hand to her head as if dazed by the questions.

Before Winthrop could answer, the rays of the lamp fell on the pathway in front of them. The trainmen set up another shout. Then the din of the automobile suddenly ceased, and Eastcott, deadly white in the lamplight, sprang to the ground.

Evelyn gave a cry, and held out her hands to him. Eastcott seized them and shook them heartily.

“My dear Miss Deering!” he exclaimed, glancing hastily into the darkness towards the stolen car. “Thank Heaven, you are safe!”

“And the car, too,” exclaimed Evelyn, rallying bravely, and following the direction of his glance.

“No thanks to the driver, whoever he was,” exclaimed Eastcott. “But we were more anxious about you than the car.” He shook her hands again.

“There was no accident—it broke down. I was explaining to Winthrop——”

“No need to explain, my dear Miss Deering. It’s enough for the present that you’re safe and sound. We’ll talk about those things later. We must get out of this hole, and—— The men?”

He looked around him as if half expecting to meet the thieves who had stolen the car.

“ They cleared out at the double quick. I fired after them. These chaps here came along with me,” Winthrop hastily explained.

“ We might have known they’d save their skins,” said Eastcott regretfully. Then he clapped his nephew on the shoulder. “ But you’ve managed the thing finely, my boy. As soon as we located you, we made as much noise as we could to give the impression that a big reinforcement was coming, in case you were in a tight corner.” He took one of the lamps and made a hasty inspection of his car. “ Something wrong with the ignition, I think,” he called out shortly; “ but I guess I can fix that in a jiffy. There’s enough gas to carry her another fifty miles, and I figure that Las Vegas isn’t more than thirty. We ought to make it in an hour or two.”

“ Trail’s a bit cut up, and there are a couple of fords between here and Watrous,” said Winthrop, “ but not more than a thimbleful of water in either.”

His uncle looked contemplatively at the smaller car, noisily panting and throbbing in the middle of the road. “ We’d better drive it into Watrous, I suppose, and leave it there as evidence of the identity of the owners if the sheriff wants to lay them by the heels. Anybody here know how to drive the thing? ”

No one in the shadowy group volunteered.

“ Take her in tow, Boss, and I’m good to steer

her and brake her as far as town," said the scout.

Some twenty minutes later, the procession was ready to set forth—the "train hands" mounting the rear car with the pilot at the top of the slope, and Winthrop and Evelyn sitting in the tonneau behind Eastcott. The girl had shown no hesitation this time in entering the stolen automobile.

As the touring car moved out of the canyon into the open country, the lights at the rear fell upon the mica window of the top, casting a dim aureole of silver around the girl's head and throwing her features into faint outline. It seemed to Winthrop that her profile had the clear-cut delicacy of an old cameo silhouetted upon the surface of a moon-stone.

"Oh," she said in distress, "what a trouble I've been! I ought never to have come with you from Kansas City at all. But this morning—what else could I do? Father is ill and needs me."

"Do you mean that those men told you they were taking you to him?" asked Winthrop incredulously.

Evelyn answered in surprise. "Why, yes! I was on the mountain early, you know. One of them—the nicer one—came to me, and told me Father was—dying—and Mr. Eastcott's car was waiting to take me to him at Las Vegas." Her voice trembled and faltered. "He said you all knew—that we should stop at the hotel to pick you up, but that we must hurry."

“ But we didn’t know.”

“ Then he lied to me? I suspected it when we dashed past. But Father was—sick—and—I could not care very much about anything else. Later, they told me that he was not dying—but only ill.”

“ And your father is at Las Vegas instead of at Santa Fé as he wrote you? ”

Winthrop saw it all now, the trick by which the girl had been trapped, and he understood clearly enough why she had needed no persuasion to enter the familiar automobile. But why the men were taking her to Las Vegas and what they intended to do with her there, he could not even conjecture. He did not for an instant put any faith in Colonel Deering’s supposed illness. He took it for granted that the purpose of the men was to kidnap her and to ultimately collect a ransom of some kind from her friends; but the details of the plot were hopelessly obscure. He wondered how much of Evelyn’s explanation Eastcott could hear from the front seat.

“ I never thought of that.” She paused before continuing. “ We were in the canyon for a long time while the men worked over the car. Then all at once they said somebody was coming and that we must run. They were very angry, and one of them pulled me out of the tonneau by my arm. It was dark, and—and—I was frightened and—and drew my arm away, and flew down the canyon toward Las Vegas, and—you were there! ”

“ Yes, yes! ” said Winthrop quickly, suppressing with an effort the “ dearest ” that was trem-

bling on his lips. "But you are quite safe now, and I have no doubt we shall find Colonel Deering less ill than you suppose."

The rush of the waters as the car plunged through the fords was like mysterious music, and the white beads of foam in the wake were a path of elfin moonbeams across the miniature seas. Once the car stopped, and Eastcott, with a warning toot of the horn, climbed down and raised the bonnet for a swift inspection and some minor adjustment, speaking to the automobile in an undertone as if coaxing it to put forth its best power. The night enveloped the travelers like a cloak. Nothing in city life had prepared Winthrop for such dense blackness.

But gradually the darkness softened into purple shadow and the earth took on faint color and form. The stars appeared like tiny skylights opening into the brightness of heaven above the lofty walls of gloom. The grass was faintly silvered as with dew.

When the automobile entered Watrous, the station master and his companions took over the derelict car with enthusiasm and helped to drain the "coffee mill" of her last drop of the vital "gas." Then the scout clambered on board the touring car beside Eastcott.

"I reckon they'll be out on the trail of them greasers early to-morrow," said the old man when the town had been left behind. "I seen some such outfit as that craft down at the mines once."

"The owners will have a hard job to get their

property back again, if those boys at the station can help it," answered Eastcott. "They'll have to walk back to where they came from if they don't manage to board a train."

"Anyhow, I'm glad to get shet of it." The pilot rubbed his back in sympathy with his words, as the car forded another stream. "Thar's been a heap of friction between me and that tarnation gas wagon. Give me a 'hay-motor' and a good Western saddle every time!"

The wind had died down to almost a whisper. As the automobile passed Kroenig—a railroad station beside glittering rails that apparently crept no further into the darkness than the rays of the telegraph operator's lamp—a silver light sped on ghostly feet across the broad expanse of the prairie. The moon had risen. The rounded bastion of a butte, flat-topped as if the sky had engulfed its crown, reared itself from the plateau in lonely massiveness. The jolting of the car had ceased, as though the road would atone for the rough trails of the day.

For some time Winthrop watched Evelyn in the moonlight, and as her head drooped lower and lower, he drew imperceptibly closer. At last the eagle's feather on the felt hat dipped until the girl's cheek rested on his shoulder.

For several moments he looked out across the shining prairies, hardly daring to breathe lest he disturb the sleeper. As during the day Nature had seemed hard and cruel, so now in the night which blotted out ugliness, she was suddenly again

beneficent and mild. He put out his arm. The mildness of which he was conscious was in the spirit of nature rather than in the crisp night air; and he fancied the girl shivered in spite of the Navajo blanket cloak. Slowly, cautiously, the arm crept on. It circled her slender shoulders. It drew her closer within the folds of his heavy ulster. And Evelyn sighed but did not wake.

The ecstasy of that moment in the canyon, when he held her in his arms, swept over him again. His heart beat fast; the blood raced in his veins. He felt an almost overpowering desire to press his cheek to hers. He lived over again the scene of her rescue. She loved him! In her fright she had betrayed an affection and dependence which almost surprised even while they enraptured him. The day that had begun for him so ill appeared to have ended in the consummation of his dearest dreams. The glory of the night—of the whole world—was but the setting of his love drama. He bent his face to hers. But with the motion, there suddenly recurred to him the remembrance of that shot he had fired into the darkness after the fleeing thieves. He drew back. Had he hit one of the men—wounded—killed, perhaps? He shuddered. So soon had he yielded to the spirit of the West? He thought of those dry riverbeds torn up by the raging torrents of the storm and of the fierce strength in which he had exulted only a few hours before. Then he looked at Evelyn's gentle face upon his shoulder. What had love to do with aught but Beauty and Peace?

The strident puffing of a passing locomotive and the raucous roar of the wheels broke at last into Winthrop's thoughts. Numerous tiny lights were glittering in the distance. A breeze blew into his face. There was the scent of mountain pine. Faintly there came the concatenation of sounds which make up the life of a railroad center. Then in another moment bright lights shone in his eyes.

With a start Evelyn awoke. She drew away from Winthrop hastily and looked out silently from under the canvas canopy.

"Las Vegas," said Winthrop, anticipating her question.

She repeated the name mechanically, sitting very straight in the shadows.

There were streets now—deserted and all but quiet; then a long line of low, red roofs, a turret tower, and shadowy arches. A few trees fringed the sidewalk. Eastcott blew the horn as a signal, and a hotel porter advanced from the light of a doorway.

"Show me to Colonel Deering's room at once," cried Evelyn with a peremptoriness quite new to her.

The man assisted her from the car politely, then shook his head.

"Colonel Deering? Excuse me, lady; I reckon we've no gentleman of that name here. I'll see the clerk."

"It's the gentleman who is ill—dangerously. I'm his daughter. He sent for me."

The man shook his head again. "We don't have sick folks at Las Vegas. It's a health resort," he said with an attempt at humor. "Sorry to disappoint you, lady."

Evelyn looked helplessly at the three men. "But they said he was here," she insisted. "Oh, what shall I do?"

Eastcott followed the porter into the hotel with an air of cheerful assurance. The clerk soon confirmed the announcement of the porter—no Colonel Deering had registered.

"Suppose we telephone at once to the hotel at Santa Fé, where your father was stopping when he last wrote," suggested Eastcott. "Someone there can give us the definite information that we want. I have an idea that this whole thing is nothing but a hoax."

From the telephone booth a few minutes later, his voice rang out. "Hello! Hello! Is Colonel Deering—Deering—D-e-e-r-i-n-g—stopping there? Yes—that's the name. Good! I'd like to speak with him. Eh, what? Oh, never mind if he has retired! Switch him on. Yes, speak to him at once. Friends. Say that the matter is urgent."

Eastcott reached a kindly hand to the girl, who waited, trembling by his side, and putting the receiver into her shaking fingers, pushed her gently into his place before the instrument. For a moment Winthrop thought she would fall, for she turned so white as she held the receiver to her ear.

"Dad—Dad, dear, is it really you? And you are well? What? Yes, we'll be there to-morrow

night. And you are not ill—and everything's all right? No, I haven't a cold. Crying? Perfectly absurd, dear! My voice is hoarse from—from laughing at Mr. Eastcott's jokes. Yes, we're having a glorious journey. You're sure you are quite well? Raton? Yes, this morning. The trip was—delightfully exhilarating. We came very fast. Good-night. Good-night, dear!''

CHAPTER XIV

THE day following the arrival at the mountain town of Las Vegas, was one of general adjustments—for Eastcott, to the recovery of a treasure he had so nearly lost—for Winthrop, to a world of materiality where love withdrew itself into a half defined reserve and glanced at him askance with shy, veiled eyes. The car, having developed certain unconstitutional complaints over night which cried loudly for immediate attention, was put into the casualty ward of the garage for reconciliation with the harsh demands of further arroyos and New Mexican roads. Mrs. Eastcott, of all the party, adapted herself most readily to the conditions resulting from the long, wild race across the prairies and the rescue in the shadows of the little Dog Canyon. When, early in the afternoon, she reached the low, red-tiled hotel, accompanied by her faithful gilly, McNulty, and a bodyguard of bags and rugs, she was already prepared to make of Evelyn a heroine and martyr. The girl's protests against this new rôle might have been offered to the purple and rose-colored rocks of the mountains for all the heed Mrs. Eastcott paid. Declining her husband's invitation to go on the electric railway to the lovely health resort of Hot Springs, six miles away, the elder

woman settled herself to listen to every detail of Evelyn's flying journey across the plains. She made an excellent "gallery," the girl assured her in comic despair, for she interlarded the "melodrama" with horrified exclamations and little groans that passed very well for hisses, and she was generally so wrought up with excitement that she fairly screamed when the "noble hero" fired into the darkness after the "escaping villains."

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she sighed, when Evelyn had laughed her into calmness. "I feel as if you had been snatched from the tiger's dripping jaws. If Win hadn't come——" She finished her exclamation with a shudder.

But "Win" had come—as Evelyn had been all day blushing and self-consciously aware—come with open arms and tender lips that she had not refused. Over and over she told herself that he must know she had been too terrified by her captors' roughness and too wildly relieved at his arrival to be more than half conscious of her actions. The King of Prussia, she thought, might have kissed her then and she would not have been responsible. She hoped Mrs. Eastcott did not suspect the nature of her nephew's greeting at Dog Canyon; but as she peeped at her with surreptitious inquiry, the girl was distressfully aware that her chaperone surmised very much the kind of thing that had really happened.

A little fit of anger swept over Evelyn. Why had Winthrop not held her decorously at arm's length when she came rushing down the darkness,

and said, " Good-evening, Miss Deering," calmly and politely? Why had he not pinched her to keep her awake in the automobile, instead of letting her sleep on his big, comfortable shoulder? Why, when she had summoned her courage to meet him next morning, had he given her that gentle " Brother Ambrose " look, that said so many things she did not wish to understand?

But in spite of herself, Evelyn could not ignore the fact that Winthrop's frank, gray-blue eyes spoke Love. Love—what was it? An emotion all-absorbing and all-pervading, something so completely overmastering that her father still dwelt in spirit with a woman who had been dead twelve years! Living in the light of a devotion so perfect and so pure, Evelyn had unhesitatingly accepted man's love for woman and hers for him as the supreme beauty, the realized ideal of the soul. Was it an emotion such as this, in the dawn of its exquisite wonder, that had guided Winthrop's footsteps through the darkness to her aid? She trembled with a kind of awe, even while she shrank from admitting the new relations between them, or his interpretation of her conduct. What would happen now, she wondered? Santa Fé and Señor Santos were no longer far away; she could not drift over prairies and through ravines forever in an automobile. She might not fly from Winthrop as she had fled from the Mexican; instead, she must sit quietly beside him all the way to Santa Fé while he called her " Evelyn " and the Eastcotts jumped at all manner of false conclusions.

For she could not refuse him the privilege of her name now, since to question it would be to attach to it a significance she wished above all things to avoid. Perhaps it was the price of her rescue, as a fair damsel's sleeve hangs pennant fashion from her knightly champion's spear. At any rate, her only course lay in the acceptance of the manner of his rescue as part of his friendship as if, she told herself whimsically, Winthrop were in the habit of clasping young ladies in his arms, as a proof of his platonic regard.

Winthrop himself, playing proxy for his aunt in the picturesque little valley of the Rio Gallinas, understood something of Evelyn's thoughts. As he followed the pretty stream and climbed the hill to the wooded village that clings to the hem of the Rockies like a lovely, golden burr which refuses to lose its hold, he was trying to adjust the clinging, helpless girl of the night before to the brilliant, laughing young creature who had contrived in a few short hours to raise a shadowy barrier of reserve between them. She was absurdly grateful for his timely rescue; she was not a shade less friendly than she had been every day since they began the journey together at Kansas City. And yet Winthrop knew well enough that he dare take no more liberties and that to-day was as different from the previous night as the soft, yellow light of Las Vegas Hot Springs was different from the violet and silver glow of the evening. He tramped silently with Eastcott through quiet, shady nooks, where one might have

lingered with a book and a dream, to rocky solitudes that overhung the glittering stream, and along wagon roads that wound through tangled glens to the green depths of the forest beyond. He acquiesced in all the other's admiration of pine- and fir-clad scenery that, if not majestic, was nevertheless endlessly alluring. But while Eastcott talked, Winthrop felt his blood tingle with the memory of Evelyn's wet, velvet cheek. He wondered if she resented his demonstrations of affection, and if, after all, he was as far as ever from the realization of his dreams.

On his return, however, to the cool shades of the arcaded hotel at Las Vegas, he found that to all appearances Evelyn herself had broken down the barrier between them. She was waiting for him under one of the pillared arches almost as if she had been watching for his coming. Her eyes met his frankly. "Mr. Hammond—Winthrop," she corrected herself, "I want to ask a favor of you."

Winthrop stood before her, hat in hand, his face aglow with the keen air of the mountains; he was in a mood to grant her a thousand favors, and said so with breezy heartiness.

"Thanks," she answered seriously. "I want you to keep my adventure of yesterday a secret. That is, I want it forgotten as soon as possible."

"Secret?" he echoed. "Why, everybody in Las Vegas knows of it."

"That accounts for the reporter to whom I refused an interview an hour ago. You see, I am

more afraid of journalistic exaggerations than I used to be, Mr. Collaborator."

Winthrop took the gibe with good humor. "As far as the Press is concerned," he said, "I don't think the story will go any further. I've just seen the editor of the 'local,' and he promises that no wires will be sent to the 'dailies,' and I'm keeping the affair back from Knight. I made the fellow understand that if this story got out, it would dampen all enthusiasm for automobile travel along the Santa Fé Trail. People in California and in the East would say it wasn't safe, and that's an impression which no one around here would have get about for the world. There was enough material in the story for a romance, but the 'local' has finally agreed to boil down the whole stuff to a short paragraph, with names left out."

"Delightful!" She turned to him with a look of gratitude as they paced back and forth under the arcade. "The whole affair must be forgotten. Father must not know of it."

"We'll all cheerfully agree to that, Evelyn. We're none of us too proud of having failed in our guardianship. All the same I wish we could get some news of those thieves. There was nothing by which to identify the car, and nobody as yet has been able to get on their tracks."

"I hope nobody ever will," said Evelyn. "All's well that ends well—thanks to you!"

"Do you know," he said abruptly, "I'm fast coming to the conclusion that there's something

more behind this than we have yet discovered. McNulty found patched tires on the wheels after those two blow-outs, and he insists that they were not the ones he put on at Chicago. Then the camping outfit had been meddled with, though probably that signifies nothing.

“Do you mean a plot?”

“Yes; seriously, I believe I do.”

Evelyn brushed the idea aside. “You are joking, Winthrop! Father and I haven’t an enemy in the world, and I’m sure you and the Eastcotts are equally peaceable.”

Winthrop shook his head. “I don’t want you to hold me to that promise of secrecy too strictly.

“Why?”

“Because there is something about the affair which, for your sake, and because it was directed against you more than against anyone else, makes me feel it should be sifted to the bottom.”

“If I have enemies, Winthrop,”—Evelyn looked at him appealingly—“I—I think I would rather not know it. You cannot make inquiries without some degree of publicity, and then the inevitable will happen—my father will hear about the whole thing. That is what I wish to avoid. The very thought of my danger would make him miserable with anxiety.”

Winthrop gave her his hand in pledge.

It was not till after luncheon on the following day that the party finally left Las Vegas. Even at the last moment, the local authorities were reluctant to let Eastcott depart before they had

found some clew to the thieves. But since he had recovered his car and his charge, he was quite willing to accede to Evelyn's request and "let sleeping dogs lie." No news had come from Watrous, and the mechanical curiosity in which he had traveled the day before was therefore formally bequeathed to any indifferent judge of motor-car quality who cared to own it, and the touring car set out gayly on the last stage of the journey to Santa Fé.

All that Raton had hinted of a country as foreign to the civilization of the North as the desert villages of Algeria, the trail from Las Vegas realized. There were no longer wide ranches and the prosperous farms of the white man. Instead, rocky foothills appeared; wild mountains were dotted with pueblos; poverty-stricken adobe villages and quaint Indian cemeteries, with wooden crosses set in rude heaps of stone, stood out clear against the sky. For many hundreds of miles now the party was to meet as many Indians as Pale-faces, and English ears were to encounter almost everywhere liquid Spanish or strange dialects from the lips of half-breeds or copper-colored Navajos and Pueblos.

Seven miles out of Las Vegas the automobile made a wrong turn; and while Eastcott was still puzzling to understand why he had no memory of this inconceivably rough country of steep ravines and dry river-beds, of lonely cliffs and dismal adobes, he found himself on the top of Bernal Mountain. The mistake was obvious enough then,

and Eastcott and Winthrop wandered about on foot to reconnoiter, till at the top of a knoll they met two men on pony-back. If Eastcott had not known a little Spanish, which was the only language the strangers could boast, he would never have suspected that the two were out hunting stray cattle, for there was no food in sight but the stiffest and driest of cedar brush. After a great deal of gesticulation, the taller of the men—an ugly, evil-visaged fellow with a scar between his eyes—advised a descent to the village of Romero by the way the automobile had come, and McNulty disgustedly turned the car round and crept downward over the rocky pathway.

“ Road and river and rail
And ho, for the Santa Fé Trail!
The mule and his pack
Will never come back
On the up-to-date Santa Fé Trail,”

chanted Evelyn, as beyond Romero the car entered a narrow pass between rocky walls that seemed to have been wedged apart by the trio of intruders.

“ The mule and his pack have provided good substitutes, then,” said Winthrop, waving his hand toward a herd of cattle which came suddenly round a bend, slipping and stumbling with hanging muzzles over the steep, narrow pathway.

“ Better pull her up, McNulty,” instructed Eastcott, “ and let the procession go by.”

The automobile waited impatiently as the muzzles pressed inquisitively against the bonnet and the sliding hoofs clattered by over the stones. Mrs. Eastcott gave a sigh of relief when the road was clear again.

"I prefer a flock of goats on an Alpine pass," she said with plaintive resignation.

Rougher and rougher grew the Trail as it threaded its way through the narrow valley. Between the purple mountain walls the sand spread a path of tarnished gold, and another path of blue showed far above. The changing levels, the narrow turns, the constant surprises in hue and scene were a grateful relief after the wide monotony of the plains. Little side canyons, diverging from the parent ravine, revealed patches of color blended into kaleidoscopic patterns. Once an Indian, wearing a blanket and the head-fillet of his race, passed the car with a haughty stare. But even the man's threadbare shabbiness could not hide the dignity of his manner and bearing; he might have been an ancient Roman coming forth from the Coliseum instead of a herald of the dismal, little village of Tecolote which lay where the paths of gold and of blue widened. A broad, shabby *plaza* with a small church, or *iglesia*, in the center, was the focus of a life which appeared to have as little movement as a lizard basking in the sun of an old wall; adobe huts surrounded the *plaza*, lazily indifferent to the cross which surmounted the church. Mexican in plan, and Indian in its dull, never-changing attitude of su-

preme contempt for progress, the village was a glaring anachronism when contrasted with the pulsating life and restless energy of American civilization just over the frontier. The car drove round the *plaza* and out again, without arousing more than a momentary interest in the figures which squatted before the doorways.

Beyond the shallow, sandy Tecolote creek the Trail rose and fell precipitately over rocks and stones hurled downward ages before by the mountains as if in vain attempt to prevent man's invasion of the solitudes. Cedar stumps, deserters from a sturdy army which marched from mountain to mountain, vied with the boulders to block the way, and though moccasined feet knew well how to slip lightly amid the unfriendly snares, rubber-tired wheels found the advance through the ravines a slow and dangerous task. The climb seemed endless, and the car came dangerously near being stalled on high "centers" and washed-out roads, before it reached Old Bernal, a Mexican town and conglomeration of adobe huts from which it was difficult to discover the proper path. Beyond a ridge, however, the railroad once more came to the rescue as guide, and led the way around Starvation Peak, where a hundred years before, a band of Spaniards had been surrounded by Navajos and starved to death. Far up against the sunny sky rose the cross supposedly planted by the strange brotherhood of the Penitentes—mystic devotees of a fanaticism which, cruel as the Indians them-

selves, openly crucified its members as penance for human sin.

The valley widened as it approached the Pecos River, and coyotes slunk out of the path behind the boulders, or skulked from cedar to cedar, till prompted by Civilization's antagonism to the wilderness and its savage denizens, Eastcott took a couple of random shots at the disappearing forms.

Beyond a long tunnel where the railroad skirts the Glorietta Mountains, McNulty hesitated at a fork in the Trail. There was no sign to mark the way, but Eastcott pointed to one of the paths, beyond a serpentine ford, and the chauffeur headed the car into the stream. Uncertainly it proceeded over the rough way, Mrs. Eastcott clinging to the side of the tonneau as if she were trying to steady herself on a steamer's deck in a heavy sea. At last, when the road gave promise of taking pity upon the sufferers, without warning the car stopped.

Eastcott jumped down. To his dismay it was stalled on a high ridge. Though McNulty raced the engines till the hills echoed the thundering reports, it remained fast. The wheels were several inches off the ground.

"She's as snug as the Ark on Mount Ararat," said Eastcott in despair. "It's always the best looking road that proves to be the worst one. I've noticed that fact more than once on this journey."

"Best!" echoed his wife, with an expressive sniff. She gave a little cry of dismay as her hus-

band and nephew joined McNulty, who was getting out the pick and shovel in order to remove the obstructing soil from beneath the car. "You don't mean to say you're going to use that shovel, John, like a common ditch digger?"

"One of the pleasures of Transcontinentalism, my dear! But I'm afraid this 'hold-up' is going to cause a little inconvenience to you as well. I wanted to drive the car up the long slope there to that ruin." He pointed dramatically with the heavy shovel to the massive adobe walls which crowned an elevation ahead. "Now I'll have to suggest that you walk up there while we dig out the car."

Mrs. Eastcott betrayed no particular interest in the ruin. "I think I would rather stay comfortably here, John. But Win—you don't want him to work, do you? Why not let him take Evelyn up there? She'll be tremendously interested in—what did you say that tumble-down affair was?"

"Pe——" Eastcott threw out a shovelful of earth "—cos Church."

"Pecos!" cried Evelyn excitedly. "Why, that's the site of Montezuma's birthplace—the oldest Aztec city in the United States!" She made a hasty movement to open the tonneau door.

Mrs. Eastcott looked at her affectionately. "I knew you would want to see it, dear! Win, put down that old jack and help Evelyn. John and I will get the car out."

Winthrop laughed as Evelyn jumped lightly

down over the gunny sack on the running board. "Good, Aunt Nell! All you've got to do is to jack up the left rear wheel and then fetch that log over there and prize the front axle off while Uncle John and McNulty throw big stones in the ruts."

"Very well!" said Mrs. Eastcott in an undismayed, matter-of-fact tone. But as Winthrop and Evelyn walked briskly up the hill, she settled herself luxuriously among the cushions. When, a few seconds later, Eastcott's shoveling brought him close to her side of the tonneau, she said softly, "John, you don't mind my not being interested in your old ruin, do you?"

Her husband raised an amused, perspiring face. "Not in the least, Nell. I always knew you were a better diplomatist than antiquarian."

From the summit of the gently sloping hill up which Evelyn and Winthrop were hastening, the ancient adobe ruins of Pecos Church looked out over the little stream which wound its way through the valley, unmindful of death and decay. Under the shadow of the thick, crumbling walls, there were signs of former habitations. Here had stood the Aztec city where Montezuma, the god of the Pueblos, had long ago planted the tree upside down beside the sacred fires of the *estufa*. Where now was the sacred symbol of life and of national existence which had so often encouraged the poor, miserable Pueblos, oppressed by Spanish rule, to renewed hope and patience? Who now remembered Montezuma's promise of deliverance by the



"I always knew you were a better diplomatist than antiquarian."

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“Fair God out of the East” who should come to deliver from their bondage the oppressed race? General Kearney had brought his white soldiers across the mountains from the plains of Kansas, and the rule of the Spaniards was at an end. The old Pecos Church still stood, ruined and weathered, symbol of the patient Pueblos who yet await the second coming of their prophet and the raising of their dead.

“Perhaps—who knows?—he may come floating down from his heaven of sunshine, in crimson robes and purple plumes, this very afternoon,” said Evelyn as she and Winthrop stood in the old nave, and looked out upon the vista of the hills.

“If Montezuma ever does return in his fiery chariot to rekindle the sacred flames, let’s hope his rig has a higher clearance than ours!” said Winthrop.

“It looks like a place of forgotten dreams,” said Evelyn. “It has nothing in common with America.”

She was thinking of the story that a wrinkled, bead-eyed woman in the pueblo on the ranch had told her—the story of a beautiful brown maiden who had once traveled a long and wearisome journey with the old Cacique, her father, from this desolate upland of New Mexico where the holy city of Pecos enshrined the eternal flame of Montezuma. No wonder, thought Evelyn, as she looked at the crumbling ruins, that the Pueblo girl had been willing to change the tall, gray adobes that had reared their dismal fronts in serried ranks

around the *plaza* for the smiling glory of the plains! No wonder the Cacique had been glad to escape the enslavements of the hated Spanish conquerors of that land where centuries before his ancestors—the first “Americans”—had lived and loved, toiled and suffered and died with their history unwritten! Poor, miserable, peaceful Pueblos! They had once been such proud rulers of the South! Evelyn knew how the beautiful brown girl must have worshiped the glory of her Aztec forefathers, how eagerly she must have undertaken that toilsome journey over the plains to watch for the “Fair God” whom Montezuma had promised her people should come from the East with deliverance in his hands. It was easy to picture her here now in the ruins of Pecos—the “shoes of silence” and beaded, deerskin leggings, short skirt and cotton chemisette, dark, coarse hair, newly washed in amole and coiled in glossy imitation of cup handles behind her ears, the pendant of opaline shell hung upon her forehead by a scarlet cord.

Winthrop and Evelyn stood in the oppressive shadow of the crumbling, ashen desolation—a desolation bare and devoid of any characteristic architecture, symbol of a lifeless religion that could no longer offer any consolation to its dependents. Her eyes were fixed dreamily on the dull ruins, but Winthrop was more interested in the living, beautiful girl beside him than in his companion’s story of the visionary, brown maiden of the Past.

“You’re almost an Indian girl yourself,” he

said, half admiringly and half regretfully. "What has New Mexico done to you, Evelyn, with its legends and its romance?"

An Indian girl? Señor Santos had called her "Carmen," and had made love to her as to a maiden of Spain. But the gypsy and the Indian were not so different at heart after all. Señor Santos himself might have been an Indian warrior; he would have swung his tomahawk with fiery fervor for love of his country and a brown bride who wore a string of periwinkle beads around her throat. He was elemental, primitive in his emotions—the very embodiment of the wild, poetic passion of the Southwest. Life was simple. Why had Civilization complicated it with conflicting purposes and subtle, interwoven ambitions?

The wildness of the scene which had set Evelyn dreaming filled Winthrop with sudden home-sickness for familiar, trodden ways. He moved slightly nearer, and immediately the home-sickness fled before a comforting sense of her companionship. He looked at the venerable ruins and back again at the glowing face beside him. He and Evelyn belonged to a world of progress and activity, where men and women accomplished bold deeds and wrote their names in unselfishness and activity on the tablets of their generation. They had no part in the languor and decay of the Southwest, where man drifted idly down the stream of Time. They were of a people who had battled with the current, and they, too, must row, not

drift. And with the thought, he felt suddenly strong and confident.

“ Evelyn,” he said, “ you understood when I found you in the canyon that—you know I love you——” He broke off, his confidence ebbing away as quickly as it had come.

The girl, recalled abruptly from her vision of the Past, looked up at him, half startled. Winthrop wondered if he had made a mistake. His heart was bursting with the words that hesitated on his lips; yet already he had said too much, for she drew away from him with an almost imperceptible gesture.

“ I want no answer now, dear,” he said, taking her hand quietly in his. “ But after the other night I had to tell you as soon as I had an opportunity. All my life is bound up with the hope that you will be my wife.” He felt her hand tremble. “ You have no need to fear me. I will wait—till you are ready for me.”

He spoke gravely and simply, and Evelyn, turning away from the lonely edifice, was strangely touched by his evident sincerity. She had seen the passion of Love: she had never before met its calm.

CHAPTER XV

LATE on the day on which the Eastcotts were motoring over the mountain roads which separate Las Vegas from Santa Fé, two men traveled on horseback in an opposite direction along the sandy road which forms the approach to the Apache Canyon. In the growing dusk, there was little to distinguish one rider from the other, except that the taller of the two rode his horse with a certain dignity and grace which seemed to be lacking in his companion. Both figures were muffled, either with the intention of avoiding recognition, or because the coolness of the oncoming night justified warm clothing.

Save for an occasional peasant's cart, or a slow-plodding file of burros, whose sleepy driver trudged resignedly by their side, the riders found the road deserted. Both, however, seemed familiar with the way, and entered without hesitation the deep, overhanging shadows of the canyon. Here the Trail became rough, winding through the pass and offering steep ascents up which the horses toiled laboriously. At one point it forked abruptly; at another it apparently doubled on itself; at a third it suddenly wound toward the West. Into this latter road the travelers silently turned, riding on in the increasing darkness to a

spot where the colored lights of the railroad marked another division of the Trail and each arm of the way followed the course of the iron rails.

Suddenly the shorter of the two men pulled up his horse, dismounted, and bent his ear to the ground.

The taller rider reined in his own steed, and spoke in Spanish in a low voice. "What do you hear, Lomez?"

For several seconds Lomez made no answer. Then he stood erect with a slight laugh that held no mirth. "Nothing, Señor, nothing! I thought——"

"It makes no matter what you thought, though I know well enough what was in your mind. But you need have no fear; they will not come this way in the dark of the night."

"*Quien sabe?* Who knows?" said Lomez dismally.

He remounted his horse, and the riders advanced again cautiously along the Trail.

"You have sworn to keep it—the secret. You understand?"

"The secret, Señor?"

"The task in which you so gloriously failed. Bah! Fool that feared the shadows of the canyon and led the enterprise to ruin!"

"I did as the Señor told to me at Kansas City. It was the brave *caballero*——"

"Fool!" The taller of the riders flicked at his heels with his riding whip, and the tap of the

wood against his big spurs made an uncanny jingle in the shadowy stillness. "Not yet have I repaid you for that failure. But if you say to the *Junta* aught of it or of the *Señorita Americano*, you shall sleep forever in this dismal house of the soul-ghosts!"

"*Si, Señor,*" answered the other, glancing over his shoulder with a shudder. "But—pardon—already I think the *Junta* fears that the leader is too great a friend of the *Americanos*."

"I care not for the opinion of the *Junta*. I care but for secrecy. And to that you are bound. Another failure and your career with the *Junta* and with me is at an end."

Lomez did not answer. He had the Mexicans' superstition, and his courage was breaking down before the ghosts that he believed haunted the dark ravine. The shadows threatened. High on the hillside a breeze swung gaunt arms against the sky where dwarf pines and cedars swayed mystically to an eerie souging that might have been the voices of spirits crying through the night. The road had forked again, and the path bent in a broad arc until the faces of the riders were turned towards the faint brightness that still lingered in the western heaven. But even that delicate ribbon of light disappeared as the walls of the Apache Canyon closed in on the travelers. They had entered the rocky gorge of sinister name and more sinister history—the Pass where at Glorietta the Texans had made their last stand against the Confederate troops who were attempt-

ing to conquer the abandoned territory of New Mexico. Between the mountain walls trail and railroad and stream were squeezed together as if seeking the consolation of companionship. In the darkness of that hour, the canyon seemed a veritable gateway of doom, offering no escape to those unfortunate enough to have walked into its trap. Lomez hardly dared to lift his eyes, but crossed himself secretly as he dived into the terrifying recesses. He had been previously forced to come along that path with his intrepid leader, and he had never failed to hear the death dirge of the soldiers who had fallen at Glorietta when Kit Carson and his men drove back the Texans and re-won Santa Fé. Along every foot of this classic ground ghosts dogged his steps, and to him the granite rocks, the sandy paths, and the bridges, which had been repeatedly swept away by mountain freshets, were a hundred times accursed. To-night, he had been childishly glad to see a light in the ranch house at the entrance to the canyon, as if a nightmare dream were partly dispelled by some reassuring voice.

But to the other rider the Pass had no terrors. It was hallowed to him not only by association but because of its strategic possibilities in certain schemes which for years had been formulating in his mind and in those of other moving spirits of the great "*Pan-American Junta*." He knew, with a secret sense of satisfaction, that this was a spot which a skillful engineer might easily render entirely impregnable. The Apache Canyon

was the supreme expression of his patriotism; it brought him a sense of security; and his inmost spirit recognized some kinship with those unconquerable walls.

At last, at the further end of the canyon, where the dark banks sloped gently upward to the purple of the sky, a tiny pin-point of light showed in the distance. As the travelers approached, it grew larger and appeared to multiply into stars. Then the faint outline of a habitation on the slope at a short distance from the trail came into view.

"They await us," said Lomez, as the two men drew near the open door.

He and his companion alighted in front of an adobe wall where crouched two Mexicans wrapped in greasy blankets. The light showed them to be small, lank, dark-visaged fellows; their hair was long and black; and their high cheek-bones and thick lips betrayed more than a strain of Indian blood. They sat motionless and silent, glancing lazily at the newcomers. They might have been made from the same clay as the wretched mud shed against which they leaned.

The taller of the travelers called to them in tones of sharp reproach, and the Mexicans made a slow but effectual attempt to uproot themselves from the ground. Tossing to them the reins of the horses, Lomez administered a kick to a couple of rat-like dogs sniffing at his heels, and followed his companion to a low gate made of posts of dwarf cedar bound together by rawhide thongs. The creaking portal swung outward and admitted

them into an inclosure where stood a long adobe house whose tumble-down doorway was illuminated by the rays from a swinging lamp within. On the rudely fashioned step squatted a man, apparently of much the same material as the men outside. His Spanish blood, however, was less diluted than theirs, for he rose with that decorous gravity which is common to all who have more than a dash of Spain's elixir in their veins. As he lifted his slouch hat, there was a glint of bright calicoes in the background, and a woman of unmistakable Spanish birth stood framed in the doorway. Her raven-black hair and full eyes hinted of a bygone comeliness seared by the poverty around her, and like a queen she drew her long skirts about her, and smiled. The smile emphasized the wrinkles which shriveling winds and arid summers had penciled on the swart, sunburnt face. As she led the way inside, however, she diffused an air of elegance over her pink draperies by throwing a shabby black shawl over her head, and in the shadows which filled the ill-lit living-room, the meanness of her attire and her surroundings were mercifully concealed. The woman bowed the taller guest to a seat on the *colchon*, or woolen mattress, folded against the wall and covered with a red and blue Navajo blanket. Then she swept slowly out, her train dragging behind her. Filling a jug at the nearby spring, she returned and placed it before her guests.

The travelers took her attentions as a matter of course. As they drank, voices of men speaking

in Spanish and high-pitched with excitement, reached their ears. The woman's face became suddenly set and hard; the smile had gone out of it like light out of the day.

"Ah, Señor Santos, they quarrel. It is ever so."

"A pack of wolves," muttered the other under his breath, "quarreling over their own carcasses." And then aloud, he added with dignity, "It is well, Rosalia; I go."

As he rose and beckoned to Lomez, the woman threw open a door opposite that by which they had entered. Instantly a man's form blocked the way, and a voice demanded the countersign.

"Softly, Pedro; it is the chief himself." The woman bent with an air of concern to Santos, her eyes glittering like two jewels in the semi-gloom. "Caution, Señor," she whispered. "All is not well to-night between them and you."

Santos brushed angrily past her, and followed by his satellite, entered the room. The door closed, and a bolt was drawn.

The newcomers stepped into the flare of a lamp suspended from the center of what appeared to be a long, narrow room, with small windows along one of its sides, and the voices ceased with almost ominous abruptness. There was a jingling of spurs as men rose according to custom and ceremoniously bowed. Santos acknowledged the greeting formally. But he remained in the middle of the room and scanned the lowering faces intently from half-shut, narrowed eyes. His compatriots

were Mexicans, but members of the superior classes. As they resumed their seats on the blankets covering long settees arranged on three sides of the room, one might have seen that the leader had over them the advantage possessed by a man of ideals. Santos had not needed the warning of the Mexican woman to prepare him for the inimical attitude to which she had alluded. Though he was unaware of the exact interpretation which was to be placed upon her words, he knew Mexican human nature well enough to be always ready for open revolt. His was the master mind which had conceived the *Junta*; his was the brain which had thought; his the tongue which had stirred the New Mexicans to their innermost depths; his the satire which had lashed them with irony for their supineness and crass blindness in bending to the American yoke. For these and for many more sins of commission, there were accounts charged up against him in the dark hearts of his fellow-countrymen, though till now their lips had spoken glibly of the day of national regeneration, and had vowed allegiance to the leader.

The Mexicans glanced from Santos to each other, as if looking for a spokesman; they offered no welcome other than the first ceremonious bow. Such lack of cordiality was entirely unusual, but as Santos took his seat on a low platform facing the door, he admirably concealed any sign of discomfort or irritation. A cruel-visaged man, with a scar across one cheek, was already writing

by the side of Lomez at a table. This was Gonzales, who shared the clerical work of the *Junta*. The leader tossed him some papers, and again searched the room with quizzical, half-closed eyes.

The men had formed themselves into groups, and were talking in low voices. Not far from the little platform stood a short, wild-eyed Mexican with enormous, porcupine-quill mustachios which would have proved formidable weapons of defense in event of an attack. Pancho Bustillos was conversing with considerable volubility and fierceness of invective with a huge man who loomed like a tower among the shadows. But Orozco Barra, for so famous a bandit, had the gentlest of manners. For years he had haunted the mountain passes for the purpose of waylaying bullion trains, or descended on lonely *haciendas* for food, clothing, and horses. Santos had tamed him, and during the two months of his reform, Barra had not robbed more than three stores nor driven more than one agent away from his solitary post. With the dawn of a new era for his activities and superfluous vitality Barra was becoming ambitious, and he had already instituted a recruiting campaign for patriots among his fellow-bandits. Reveling in his newly acquired quasi-respectability, Barra was a staunch friend of the leader, and now, while he talked with Pancho, he gradually forced his companion toward the platform.

Santos, who did not appear to regard the two men, was aware that Barra was maneuvering for an opportunity to speak with him unobserved.

When Pancho, at length close to the table on the edge of the slight elevation, leaned for a word with Lomez, the huge bandit fixed his eyes absently on the swinging lamp. Long years of professional training on the Mexican border had taught him the priceless value of secretiveness at the right time. No one but Santos guessed now that his lips moved.

“Villara—the Americanos!”

And Barra was again deeply interested in conversation with Pancho.

Santos answered with a veiled sneer. Villara, that black sheep of the Nationalist cause, who, he had for long half suspected, was ready to betray the *Junta*! Over and over again, a conciliatory sop had been thrown to this political Cerberus. Santos was tired of compromising with the man. Villara was less a menace to the interests of the party out of it than in it. There he was, then, in a corner with a dozen silly moths fluttering about him. His pointed features, furtive eyes, and ignobly sloping forehead betrayed his cunning, but he would also have impressed an observer as a man of energy and daring. The leader suspected that Villara had not looked for his presence to-night, since it was known that he had been away. His appearance had undoubtedly caused the Mexicans to hurriedly drop any open discussion. As Santos glanced in Villara's direction, the wily Mexican lifted his hand in some pre-arranged signal. Instantly the groups broke up into units and the men took their seats on the

settees along the walls. Villara himself remained standing.

Undeniably the majority of men in the room thus avowed themselves followers of the "traitor." Santos' supremacy had never before been openly questioned; something must be done at once. He knew that the Mexicans were ostensibly assembled that the Judas might report upon the condition of the branch societies which he had been commissioned to visit. Disregarding the signal of the other, Santos rapped peremptorily on the table with his riding whip.

"The Señor Villara will present to the *Junta* his report," he announced with calmness.

Villara twirled his mustaschios as if to add to the ferocity of his aspect and to make his words the more mordant and crushing. He wore a brazen self-possession that flaunted itself before the eyes of the leader. Yes, he had visited the societies, it was true. He had much to tell concerning the enthusiasm he had everywhere found. The brethren within and across the border longed to strike a blow for Mexico and if need be shed their blood for the grand Cause. But what chance had the Cause when there were those who served it only as a blind for their perfidy? Was this—the most sacred thing on earth to those who had hidalgo blood in their veins and who had inherited the greatness of Spain—to be made a tool for treachery? Why should he talk of a report when even now there were traitors in the camp—men in high places, who could utter with their lips

high sounding loyalties, and at the same time find pleasure among those they were sworn to distrust?

Villara swept the assembly of swarthy, silent men with his piercing glance, finishing with a grand flourish of his arms and a shrill crescendo.

Santos had listened without change of countenance; indeed his manner betokened approval of the stinging condemnations of the fiery orator. Nevertheless, he was secretly astonished at the unexpected significance of the speaker's innuendos. He understood at once that somewhere Villara must have heard a whisper of his infatuation for the American girl. And, though he had denied it to Lomez, he placed not a little value upon the opinion of the *Junta*.

As Villara ceased speaking, a wild babble of voices arose. His oratory had set fire to the gunpowder of Mexican volubility, and the men turned to each other with gesticulations and exclamations. Several jumped to their feet and tried to make themselves heard above the hubbub. But not until Santos himself called for order did the confusion subside.

"This that our friend has said is good." Santos' voice was clear and firm, but his eyes were points of light that pierced the gloom. "There is indeed an enemy who camps with us. Long have I suspected that the shadows of the canyon on a starless night were no darker than the heart of one who works with us only to deceive. It waits but that he should be named

and—punished as the *Junta* knows how to punish.”

This time there was not a sound in the low, ill-lit room as the speaker paused. The Mexicans gazed at Santos in amazement. They had been prepared for anger, protestation, indifference—anything but this ready acquiescence. Could it be that he had failed to understand that the charge was directed against himself? Or was there actually another and greater traitor whom he had been watching for their sakes and biding his time to denounce? They were dazed and silent.

Not so Villara! With much impressiveness he arose, and after a pause which served to concentrate everyone's attention upon himself, he announced pointedly that as Señor Santos was aware, the treacherous member was even then present!

There was a stir of suppressed excitement. The leader raised his riding whip above his head in the lamplight. “Name him!” he cried passionately. “I call upon you to give him name!”

The audience looked breathlessly at Villara, who, surprised at the unexpected show of daring, cowered before the blazing eyes and the fearless challenge. He muttered under his breath and glowered at the speaker; then he sat down with a defiant laugh.

Santos shrugged his shoulders, and his arm dropped. He had made a bold play, and it had succeeded. No one answered his “dare,” and he knew that already the Mexicans began to doubt

the truth of Villara's assertions. A man who was afraid to confront another openly with the charge made indirectly was not one whose word was to be greatly trusted. Santos understood the reasoning of his compatriots.

"Is it I then who shall tell you the name of the traitor?" he said coolly. "And I—I am not afraid to speak. Let him beware." He leaned forward and repeated the last word with a hiss: "Beware!" Villara cringed. But already Santos' manner had changed. "You are but children that quarrel over littleness when great danger threatens," he said scornfully.

It was true; they were children—children of emotion, and easily diverted, but they could not so soon entirely forget Villara's charges against the leader. Pancho rose impulsively.

"Why do we talk of traitors?" he said hotly. "There is but one way to prove traitor or patriot. Let the man fight. Let him bare his breast to the bullets of the enemy. For a thousand years did not the Spaniard march victorious across the face of the world? Who are we that we should spend our time in plans that come to nothing? Does the blood of the freeman or of the lizard that basks in the sun run in our veins? Is it forever *mañana*, the curse of our race? Let us fight, and the traitor shall fight with us and prove that he is true."

As Pancho paused, Barra spoke with a voice like a cooling stream. "We are Spaniards, but the Spaniard has ever known when to strike. We

await but the moment. To rise now is defeat, and the sons of Spain in New Mexico must not again be defeated."

Pancho snapped his fingers with a gesture of fiery impatience. "The sons of Spain have become babes; our leader has said it."

"Does not the bull bear many pricks before he rushes at the matador?" asked Barra. "The Americanos wave before us flaming taunts. They stab us with darts, but we shall charge and destroy."

Santos stood erect before his audience. His head was high; his lips smiled confidently. He knew that he held the *Junta*, always prone to argument and disagreement, again in the hollow of his hand. The light from the lamp fell full upon his face and revealed him to his comrades more ideally a leader than ever before. "And while we wait for the moment, is there nothing to be done? We have no faith in the civilization of the Americanos for the empire of the Spaniard. The Teutons and the Slavs are dreaming of the union of their races; in the West we, too, dare to dream. We would throw off alien yokes. The Spaniard has been great and world encompassing. Chilian, Peruvian, Mexican—again he is to become great, regenerated, purified in the crucible of the ages. From political centers that are small, already leaders have sent forth fruitful shoots to many countries. Is not the Pan-America of the Latins assured? We dream of pronunciamientos, restorations. But shall we not, as we wait,

strengthen ourselves with some force greater than these? Shall not the Americanos themselves contribute, unsuspecting, to our power? Have they not mixed the blood of all the nations with their own to become strong? You have said that the sons of Spain are puny. Fight, I say to you, fight! But fight not alone with the bullet and the sword! Make of all that comes to your hands your weapons! And——”

Santos paused. There was a sudden subdued commotion at the rear of the hall. A man opened the door cautiously into the adjoining room. The Mexicans sprang to their feet.

As the rude door swung backward, a gust of cool air set the lamp flickering, and it was evident that the outer door was open to the night. Then the rhythmic throb of an engine sounded through the tense silence, and a man's voice was heard in parley with the Señora. The doorkeeper closed the door of the assembly room hastily.

“An Americano!” he hissed.

“*Carrambas!*” whispered Barra. “It is the betrayal.”

“It is but a stranger with fair hair who inquires the road to Santa Fé,” said the doorkeeper under his breath. “He guesses nothing. There is no fear.”

But Santos, in whose ears the throb of the engine sounded ominously, shrank back into the shadows. He had caught a fleeting glimpse of Winthrop Hammond.

CHAPTER XVI

COLONEL DEERING, in his sitting-room at Santa Fé, looked fondly at his daughter as she sat on the arm of his chair and smiled down into his face. She was delicately browned by the winds and suns of her week's journey, and the brightness of her eyes and the crimson that showed in her cheeks beneath the tan, like veiled roses, spoke eloquently of health and a joyous spirit. No wonder, he thought, that Santos found her desirable! She was like her mother—a woman to bring to the man she loved a wealth of happiness that would fill the coffers of earth with the shining jewels of heaven. /

But in all the years that had passed since her death, Colonel Deering had not missed his wife as keenly as now. Evelyn's masculine admirers of the aggressive type had never been in favor with her father; still he had always had her assurance that they were nothing to her, and he had, in consequence, managed to bear their attentions with passable grace. But there had been an indefinable something in the manner of Santos' proposal of marriage that had made Colonel Deering understand that this was quite a different affair from any that preceded it, and he realized, with dismay, his own inadequacy for the present

situation. He felt suddenly clumsy and heavy-handed, as if Evelyn's heart were an exquisite butterfly, too delicate for his masculine touch. A girl needed a woman to understand her love. Evelyn's mother would have known how to deal with the emergency, and how to win the girl's confidence.

For there was "the rub"; Evelyn had said nothing to her father as yet about any proposal from the Mexican. Although she had promised herself that she would confess, as soon as she reached Santa Fé, exactly what had occurred in the ballroom at Kansas City, Winthrop had inexplicably tied her tongue. She could not talk to Colonel Deering of one lover without telling him of the other, and her whole being shrank from the natural impulse of her father to balance the men against each other, and from the consciousness that he would watch her to discover which she preferred. Colonel Deering had been trying to break down her reserve by talking to her of his own wooing, but though she had been all interest and tender absorption in his reminiscences, he had not succeeded in persuading her to speak of her own affairs. Nevertheless when, as she still sat beside him, a box of crimson poinsettias arrived without card or message, the Colonel made up his mind that in one way or another he must take matters in hand at once. Business still detained Santos from Santa Fé, but apparently his reappearance was imminent.

"Suppose they're from Santos, little girl?"

the Colonel said, almost ruefully, as Evelyn held up the fiery blossoms.

“ Yes, of course! ” she said frankly. “ He’s always thoughtful. Oh, Dad, are we not longing for the ranch and counting the minutes till we get there, you and I? ”

“ Ah, that’s the way to talk! I trembled in Chicago, Evelyn, lest those dirty, microbe-y Italian and Jewish children should carry you off again.” But Colonel Deering, who had been forced to yield to the objectionable “ settlement ” by lips that pleaded of others’ sufferings and wide eyes that held visions of sacrifice and mercy, began to wonder if New Mexican fascination was not as dangerous as that of Chicago. He would not, however, force his daughter’s confidence, and he sat for some time apparently reading his newspaper while Evelyn flitted about the room; he would give her every opportunity for a frank confession. But when a half-hour had passed, and the news in the paper had become stale, Colonel Deering arose with a suppressed sigh, and wandered listlessly out into the corridor.

Suddenly he thought of Mrs. Eastcott. She was the only woman at hand; she must talk with Evelyn, or at any rate offer the tactful sympathy that one feminine heart knows so well how to bestow upon another.

Mrs. Eastcott was easily discoverable; she had a voluminous social correspondence which claimed all her spare moments, and a small desk in a retired corner of the writing-room was jokingly con-

sidered by the party her headquarters at Santa Fé. As the Colonel dropped apologetically into the chair at her side she laid down her pen and looked up with a gracious smile.

Colonel Deering came abruptly to the point. "I want to ask your advice about my daughter, Mrs. Eastcott. When it comes to—er—a—a love affair I'm no use as a diplomat. I must have help."

Mrs. Eastcott's smile broadened; she fairly beamed upon the perplexed parent with a delight she made no attempt to conceal.

"Oh," she exclaimed. "I might have known that you were just as interested as I! I have done my very best, Colonel Deering, as I might as well confess, to help the affair along."

"Indeed?" The poor Colonel was thunderstruck. He thought that he must have been very dull to find himself so much in the dark concerning his own daughter's interests when a comparative stranger had evidently seen for some time how matters stood.

"Now"—Mrs. Eastcott leaned forward confidentially—"there is no use discussing anything until we know whether he has proposed. It's not my fault if he has not had every opportunity!"

Colonel Deering was staggered; at the same time he was agreeably relieved at Mrs. Eastcott's evident grasp of the situation. "That's just it!" he groaned. "I don't know whether he has spoken to her or not."

"Ah-h! I hoped you might." She drew her

chair closer to his. "Do you know, I have watched Evelyn very carefully, and I am quite sure her manner during this last week has betrayed emotion. At one time I thought—but then I changed my mind. They call each other by their first names now, and that means a pretty good understanding."

The Colonel looked dumfounded. He had never heard Evelyn say "Emilio." Mrs. Eastcott was quite right; there certainly was an understanding.

"He sent her flowers an hour ago," he volunteered dejectedly.

"Splendid! Then we may be sure the crisis is near at hand. Really, Colonel Deering, I have sometimes been quite impatient with him for being so slow about getting her promise. And Evelyn—I think she cares for him, don't you?"

"I don't know," faltered the father miserably. "She hasn't confided in me yet. That is what I came to ask you about—how you thought she felt, and if you could manage a little talk with her and some advice—the kind of thing one woman who knows love says to another who is just finding it."

Again Mrs. Eastcott's pretty face beamed. "There is nothing in the world I should like better," she said. "I've longed to speak with her a dozen times, but hesitated lest I should seem to interfere. A match-making chaperon, you know——"

Colonel Deering regarded the little desk with

its scattered sheets of writing paper abstractedly. He felt almost as if he and Mrs. Eastcott were settling Evelyn's fate themselves. The air of the room became oppressive; he could hardly breathe. He was quite overpowered with the importance of the affair which the lady discussed so familiarly and easily.

"I'm delighted you feel so cordially toward him, Colonel. It would be very disagreeable, I am sure, to have a son-in-law one didn't thoroughly approve. I'm such a believer in ancestry and heredity, and his family is unimpeachable!"

"Yes, I suppose there is nothing to be said on that score. Still, I think I could have wished——"

"That they were more alike? Oh, Colonel, I can't agree with you there. I think love has its strongest foundation in difference of temperament. That is the great attraction between these two. I felt it the first moment I saw them together at Falls City."

"Yes, yes; I have no doubt you are quite right! My own experience was so perfect that I suppose I am overcautious about any attachment not following exactly the same lines. Marriage is serious business, Mrs. Eastcott. How is a girl to know that her affection is the real thing and not some light, frothy concoction that will melt away with the first quarrel?"

"Because she never doubts it," said the lady promptly. "As soon as she questions if she loves, you may be sure she doesn't—really. But when

you know him better your mind will be quite at rest. He is really a splendid fellow."

Colonel Deering sighed. "Oh, yes, I know that. He is a local patriot, and wrapped up heart and soul in the future of New Mexico. He's not a small-minded chap by any means."

Mrs. Eastcott stared at the Colonel, as dumfounded as he had been five minutes before. "The future of New Mexico—a local patriot?" she gasped. "Oh, Colonel, have we misunderstood each other? Of whom are you talking?" But even as he returned her look with one of utter blankness, the color flooded into her cheeks. "I—I beg your pardon," she said. "I have been very stupid. I thought of course you were speaking of my nephew."

"And I was thinking of Santos!" blurted out poor Colonel Deering, mopping his brow with a white silk handkerchief.

They both laughed half-heartedly.

"So Hammond's in love with Evelyn, too!" exclaimed the Colonel. "I might have known it! I don't mind confessing he's more like the son-in-law I should have chosen. But I'm afraid Santos has taken the inner track in the race, Mrs. Eastcott."

Her brows were knitted in hasty consideration. "I can't give her up to Señor Santos," she said pathetically. "Why, Colonel Deering, I have her all mentally established in Win's home! But I will talk to her, as you suggest. Perhaps——" She shook her head disconsolately. "Oh, dear!

What can we do? She mustn't be in doubt or she doesn't truly love. And yet I wish she were in doubt."

The Colonel groaned. "We might——" continued his companion thoughtfully. "No; that would hardly do." She bit the end of her pen. "We can only throw them as much as possible into each other's society—Win and Evelyn, I mean. We will give them every chance to understand each other—and hope for the best!"

They shook hands solemnly.

And with that poor consolation the father had to be content for the present.

Colonel Deering had married into an old and reputed New England family, and when some years later he had returned to his native West, wifeless but with his wife's form and features living again in the handsome little Evelyn, he had found it as hard to recognize the world which awaited him as it was to reconcile in himself the East with the West. As the years rolled on and Evelyn grew up into womanhood, the process of adjustment became less difficult. His girl's education often took him to the East; but more potent than this influence was the miracle which had been subtly wrought upon the West. The typical American borderer, with his rudeness of manner, his scorn of those reared in cities, his passionate excesses, had vanished. The men who, in the spirit of bravado had styled themselves border ruffians, who had settled private quarrels with bowie knife or pistol, and who had thrown themselves into

fierce racial and political wars, were living the ordered life of citizens in the crowded ways of towns. A civilization compounded of law and order and of a certain freshness and heartiness of spirit, typically Western, was everywhere apparent.

As Colonel Deering strode through the long, narrow, winding streets of Santa Fé, playing guide to his friends, he tried to imagine how it would seem to be young again and to visit the West for the first time. Winthrop Hammond's impressions could hardly be as vivid as they would have been forty years before; but there was still enough that was potent to thrill a young man to enthusiasm. Once as they passed a white stone house, where a balcony hung like a heavy flower against the wall above a garden, the Colonel fancied that from behind a half-closed shutter he caught the flutter of a silken scarf and a fleeting glimpse of a dark beauty's smile. There was still plenty of Spanish blood in the city. He wondered what the young man thought of the handsome Señoritas who passed along the crooked streets of the old quarters.

"I don't suppose there's a place in the United States that has a more romantic history than Santa Fé," said the Colonel, as he led his friends into the old *plaza*, and met the hum of American civilization. "From the days of the old Pueblo settlement, the years of Spanish occupation, and the days of the Caravans from Independence—up to the time when the United States took it over,

Santa Fé has been mixed up one way or another with the most thrilling events of America."

But while he spoke, Colonel Deering, fresh from his recent conversation with Mrs. Eastcott, found that his mind still dwelt on Winthrop, and he felt suddenly very old. The little settlement which the "padres" had discovered in the valley, hugging the mountains as if it clung to them for protection, was almost more real to him, though it had been so long before his own time, than this newer city, which had become so thoroughly American.

"There wasn't a Spanish Captain-General in America for hundreds of years who didn't live inside those walls with all the pomp and majesty of a king," he said, pointing to the old arcaded palace which fronted the shaded *plaza* amidst the modern architecture of the "States." "Every Indian war, and every political move in the whole Southwest was controlled from beneath that leaky old roof, from a time before the Knickerbockers settled New York up to the days of the Texas invasion and the Civil War. You can't separate the Palace from the history of New Mexico."

Winthrop looked at the old *hacienda*-like building curiously. Though the sleepy little town of the "Holy Faith" was out of date and had been almost replaced by a progressive American city, there was still an undeniable foreign charm, which did not allow one to forget Spanish and Indian associations. Winthrop, who had never been abroad, and to whom Evelyn had spoken much

of the pathos and beauty of Santa Fé, began to understand something of its fascination. Colonel Deering had been quite right in supposing that he admired the Mexican beauties and the vine-hung balconies. He would have liked to wander through those old houses—bare-walled on the street except for an occasional window and door. He was immensely interested in the Navajo blankets and bead work displayed in the shop windows, and in the little burros, heavily laden with cedarwood and looking like huge tortoises creeping along the roadway on four slender legs. In the *plaza*, where he stood, the din of traffic and a constant passing to and fro of men and women contrasted strangely with the languor of the quaint, narrow streets from which he had just emerged. But all these things seemed to him colored by the past. They were like parts of a great picture that fascinated but could have no special significance unless a searchlight was thrown upon it to reveal its background.

What Colonel Deering had told him about the old Palace was one of the rays of the searchlight. He stared at the dingy walls and tried to grasp with his mind the magnitude of the events for which it had been responsible. The Spaniard had been a dreamer of great visions as Evelyn had often said; he had written an epic in the literature of the New World. But most of his dreams had been dreams of pillage, and the greater part of his epic had been written in blood. Winthrop, who was thoroughly American in his point of view,

He could not believe the other's interest in Evelyn had waned, and every hour that Santos remained away lent to absence a more ominous significance in Winthrop's mind.

When, a half-hour later, Eastcott and the ladies returned to the hotel, Winthrop lingered with the Colonel in the *plaza*. With Spanish reminiscence still in their minds and the old Palace across the narrow street, the young man's casual inquiry for "Señor Santos" did not seem out of place.

"It's a pity he isn't here to show you the city," Colonel Deering said generously. "He knows it much better than I do. Fact is, I suppose he's pretty busy over some big cattle deal. He wrote me several days ago from Las Vegas that he was detained by business. Didn't get there till after you'd all left, I take it. I asked your uncle if you met him there and he said 'No!'"

"Perhaps he has gone to his ranch?" suggested Winthrop. "I've heard he has a very fine place in this part of the country."

"Indeed he has; but he can't be there just now or we should have seen him in town here. It's not many miles away, near the Apache Canyon, you know."

Winthrop started. It was in the Apache Canyon he had seen Santos. "I—er—when we came through the canyon last night we ran into a party of rough-looking chaps holding some kind of a confab there in an old house."

Colonel Deering lit a cigar. "The Apache Canyon's a spot with—— Well, most people shun it

after dark. I don't know anything about the house of which you speak, but it is just likely you surprised a secret meeting of some sort."

"You mean conspirators?" exclaimed Winthrop. Clearly there was a mystery connected with Santos' non-appearance, else why should the Mexican avoid Santa Fé and pretend to be at Las Vegas? What in truth was the nature of the "business" that detained him?

"I don't know about that, but there are several societies which carry on a kind of underground propaganda, talking in big, black letters about Mexico for the Mexicans and so on!" explained the Colonel. "They're distinctly in bad repute, but they're looked upon as so much harmless 'hot air.' I believe some of the fellows do meet in the canyon, but they're allowed to let off their squibs as they please. They've a weakness for the place because it has been the Western key to Santa Fé. How did you happen to run across them?"

Winthrop outlined briefly a story of the rough trail and the difficulty of finding the way. At Glorietta Station, he said, Eastcott had obtained directions from the telegraph operator, the first English speaking man they had encountered during the day. Before coming to an archway leading under the railroad, they were to turn right at a Mexican church. After six miles of exceedingly dangerous driving in the darkness through a canyon, they had come to the archway, but had seen no church. Discovering a trail up a narrow

ravine, they had followed it and come to an adobe hut. The people, evidently Mexicans, were sitting on benches outside and were frightened by the sight of the big acetylene lamps. However, after bargaining in Spanish, thanks to Evelyn, with the *mater familias*, they had borrowed the twelve-year-old son of the family, who after some hesitation mounted the "devil wagon." The urchin had piloted them under the railroad arch, contrary to the instructions of the telegraph operator, and a mile beyond they had found the *iglesia* as large as life. After that they had doubtless taken a wrong fork, and they had found themselves in what appeared to be an extension of the Apache Canyon. Attracted by lights, and desirous of getting their exact bearings, Winthrop explained that he had walked to a spot a little off the Trail, and there found himself beside a building occupied as he thought by Mexicans. As he could not speak Spanish, he could only repeat the word "Santa Fé" to the man who stood at the door with his wife. At that moment, an inner door opened, and a number of men came out, evidently disturbed by the noise of the automobile's engine. Winthrop had a glimpse into a large, dimly lighted room, crowded with other men. Someone—he hesitated—was making a fiery speech.

Colonel Deering listened with interest to the recital. "Firebrands, with some political blaze to set going, I've no doubt! If I were Santos I'd not care for them nor for the canyon as neighbors. Ever heard of his ancestral tragedy that happened

not far from there? No? His father was a wealthy Mexican trader and was murdered by some American outlaws—declared, I believe, to be Texans though never proved so—who were in the habit of making raids on the rich caravans. Poor Don José Santos had left Santa Fé for Independence with an outfit of wagons, his private coach, servants, and other retainers. The Don used to make all his purchases of goods in St. Louis, which was then the depot of supplies for the whole mountain region. Of course he carried with him a large amount of money in silver, which was the legal currency of the country, as he made only one trip a year to replenish the stock of goods required in his trade in all parts of Mexico. Westport Landing—Kansas City, you know—where the Don took the steamboat for St. Louis, was the refuge for as great a lot of ruffians as ever escaped a hanging. There was a noted gang of land pirates there who had been figuring for a long time as to the probable amount of coin which the Don carried with him. At last they hatched a devilish plot to get hold of his money. They did not dare attempt the robbery in Missouri, as there were too many citizens of the border who would never have let such a crime go unpunished. Their only chance was to accomplish it in the lawless Indian territory. They waited near the canyon for the arrival of the poor fellow, and his imposing equipage was held up and the baggage rifled. His whole party was murdered on the spot, but the Don was spared just long

enough to confess where his money was concealed. Then he was shot down. One of the teamsters luckily contrived to escape and to give information to the militia. A detachment of troops was sent out in pursuit, the band surrendered, and the money, about \$50,000, was restored to the widow."

"Good Heavens, I shouldn't think your friend would take any pleasure in the canyon!" exclaimed Winthrop. "I—er—I suppose you don't know whether he's interested in those secret societies or not?"

"Oh, no, no!" Colonel Deering spoke with punctilious conscientiousness. "He's quite clear of that sort of humbug. I never heard a word breathed against him. Everyone knows that Santos is a patriot as far as his pride in his Mexican blood is concerned. He has some of the old-fashioned ambitions—a bit of the spirit, you know, which a Coronado or a Cortez might have could he return to earth—that's all."

Winthrop made no answer. He questioned himself as to whether or not he ought to tell the Colonel that he had seen Santos with the Mexicans. Might he not thereby be taking a mean advantage of a rival, who doubtless had very good reasons for keeping away from Santa Fé just then? Whatever those reasons were, Winthrop could not have wished for better fortune than to have had his stay at Santa Fé with the Deerings undisturbed by the presence of Santos. On the other hand, he was curious to unravel the mystery towards which the scene in the canyon now

pointed. Clearly Santos did not wish his whereabouts known to his friends, and was keeping away under protest of urgent business engagements. It did not seem unreasonable to suppose that the gathering in the canyon was the real cause of his absence. If he were one of a band of conspirators, there were prospects of some interesting revelations. However, the Colonel was unfamiliar with the Mexican's political connections except in a general way, and Winthrop saw that, for the time being at least, it was wiser not to throw out any hint which would inculpate a rival's honor.

But that afternoon, when the Eastcotts and Evelyn returned to the hotel from an automobile ride, all thoughts of Santos were driven from his mind. As he helped Evelyn from the tonneau, she whispered hastily, "I want to speak with you, quickly—alone!" She looked disturbed, and glanced about her almost nervously lest her father or someone else should have overheard. Within the hotel she lingered behind the others.

"Well?" Winthrop said anxiously, infected against his will by her manner.

"It was one of those men, Winthrop—I am almost certain I saw him ten minutes ago. He was talking with McNulty."

"Where?" Winthrop understood at once that she referred to the men who had carried her off from Raton.

"Not far from the Curio Shop. You remember the little one-storied building with the *caretta* on

top? Mrs. Eastcott stopped to buy some Indian baskets. He was a little way down the street, and McNulty had left the car alone and was talking to him."

For an instant Winthrop thought she must be speaking in a dream. "McNulty?" he repeated. "Why, McNulty is only waiting for a chance to thrash the fellows—if he can't land them in prison."

"Oh, please—please, Winthrop—you said you would not try to bring them to justice, for father's sake. I didn't want to tell you about seeing the man just now, but I thought you ought to be on your guard—about McNulty! I'm not afraid for myself. We're going to the ranch to-morrow, you know, father and I!"

"Which man was it?" asked Winthrop, almost too astonished to speak. McNulty had been vehement in his denunciation of the thieves! McNulty had had Eastcott's, and indeed his own, entire confidence, ever since leaving New York.

"It was the shorter one, with the little black, pointed beard. I saw him from the window of the shop."

"A letter for you, sir!"

A voice sounded behind Winthrop so abruptly that he started almost as if the thief had addressed him. But the intruder was only the clerk with an envelope in his hand.

Winthrop took it almost absently. Evelyn's news was of far more importance than any letter. He had visions of a second attempt to carry her

off, though he was not entirely convinced that she had really seen the man from whom he had rescued her in the Dog Canyon. He glanced through the open doorway to the chauffeur, still busy with the car.

“ You are sure—quite sure you really just saw the man who carried you off? I think you must be mistaken, Evelyn. A little, black beard is not unu——”

He had torn off an end of the envelope and opened the folded slip as he spoke. Mechanically he dropped his eyes to the paper.

“ Binghamton, N. Y.,” he read, and hastily his eye leaped down the sheet. “—inquiries of our staff—the person who sent the telegram you inclosed, dated October—a thickset man in khaki suit, buff leggings, and leather cap——”

“ Is it bad news? ” asked Evelyn, as Winthrop stared at the paper, making no attempt to finish his broken sentence.

“ I—I beg your pardon,” he said hastily. “ It’s just a bit of yellow journalism ”—he made an attempt to smile reassuringly—“ a good sensational story. That’s all.”

But his eyes looked over her shoulder through the open doorway. McNulty wore a khaki suit, buff leggings, and a leather cap!

CHAPTER XVII

IMPULSE would have sent Winthrop on the instant from Evelyn to the chauffeur. He would have told McNulty exactly what she had said, and would have followed up the charge of complicity in the kidnapping by confronting him with the incriminating letter. But as he made a hasty movement towards the door, he realized that the impulse was a rash one. Too much was at stake to risk a false move. Incredible as it seemed that McNulty should be other than the stolid, faithful creature that Eastcott had believed him to be, subtlety and finesse would undoubtedly be required to entrap him into a confession. Therefore Winthrop, though seething and boiling within, quietly watched the chauffeur turn the automobile toward the garage while he reassured Evelyn and calmed her fears.

Alone in his own room, his outer calmness vanished. He paced back and forth from the window to the door, frowning and trying to make up his mind as to the best course to pursue. He recalled his doubt of McNulty at Chicago, the patched tires, the damaged camping outfit. These were surely minor details of some plot in which the telegram from Binghamton and the theft of the car at Raton formed an important part. The at-

tempt to carry off Evelyn with the car was what puzzled Winthrop now. But for that, the whole mystery would have resolved itself into the endeavor of an unscrupulous chauffeur and his comrades to bring disaster upon the Transcontinental journey and to get possession of a valuable automobile. The desire of the men to secure Evelyn also complicated the affair. Was it really for ransom that they had enticed her into the automobile, or was it——? For the first time his mind reached at some deeper plot than that which concerned itself merely with money and car. But like a floating ball of thistledown, blown by the wind, it evaded him. He could not solve the mystery.

McNulty was his uncle's man. The news of what Evelyn had seen and the contents of the letter from Binghamton must be confided at once to Eastcott; so much Winthrop saw clearly. He did not suppose that Eastcott would concern himself much about the latter, but the "news" that McNulty had been an accomplice in the theft would affect his uncle keenly. Perhaps he would dismiss the man. Perhaps he would send Mrs. Eastcott on with the Deerings by train, and risk for himself whatever further adventure the journey with McNulty might offer. Eastcott, however, at that moment was closeted with the Governor at the Capitol. In his uncle's absence, therefore, Winthrop saw no harm in a guarded preliminary questioning of the chauffeur. He went to the garage, but McNulty was not there.

“Your chuffer chap’s gone out to see the sights!” said a man with an oil can. “Brought the car in about half an hour ago and hurried off. Want to leave a message?”

“No,” said Winthrop curtly. He was non-plussed, taken aback. He felt as if he had made a running jump at a high fence only to suddenly find that there was no fence over which to leap. He had taken it for granted that McNulty would be getting the car ready for the next day’s run to Albuquerque. Blankly he inspected the automobile, hoping to find some indication of the chauffeur’s immediate return. But everything was in perfect order.

“Fine car, sir!” said the man with the oil can sociably. “Had a bit of bad luck, I hear. Your chuffer spun a yarn how it was ‘pinched’ down at Raton. Sed I was to watch out.”

Winthrop started. McNulty had spoken of the theft of the car! A guilty man usually kept silent.

“Yes!” Winthrop answered the man with an assumed carelessness. “We’ve had some trouble lately. Better keep a sharp lookout.”

“You bet! Anybody wants to see a car here has got to show me the number check. Your feller told me the whole story—tires and all. I’ll bet a coyote skin I saw the greaser’s car in this garedge about a week ago, mebbe more.”

“What!” cried Winthrop in incredulous astonishment. “You don’t mean the car the thieves left in place of ours?”

“Yes, sirree! No mistakin’ that old ark—

Nineteen-O-four Bangard roadster. 'Twas here two days. Course I can't say for certain sure, but I'll bet——"

"Who brought it in? Who took it away?"

The man turned to the nearest car and opened the gasoline tank with provoking deliberation.

"You've got me there, boss. Ain't got no record. But you needn't be bothered. Nobody'll get your machine as long as it's in *this* town!"

Winthrop returned to the hotel, having endeavored in vain to get any satisfactory description of the men. He was more in the dark than he had been before. If the "ark," as the garage man called it, had actually been in Santa Fé, the clew was important. If, on the other hand, as he believed, McNulty was the accomplice of the man with the pointed beard, and was himself responsible not only for the theft of the car but for patched tires and injured outfit, it was incredible that the fellow should tell a stranger the story of his own intrigues and warn him to be on his guard. Unless—Winthrop knitted his brows in an effort to solve the problem—unless he had expected that inquiries would be made at the garage, and had hoped that these very remarks would serve to allay suspicion. In that case, McNulty probably knew that he had been observed in his conversation with the thief, and was already prepared for possible questions. But the telegram—what connection had that with the recent events of the Transcontinental tour? Cudgel his brains as he would, Winthrop could find no clew to the

puzzle, and he went to dinner with McNulty still on his mind, as indigestible a mental sauce as any Fate had ever offered him.

Three times during the evening Winthrop went to the garage. At half-past ten, when the door was locked for the night, it was no consolation to imagine the chauffeur still closeted somewhere in the city with the kidnapper and planning another move in the mysterious game. Neither was it any consolation to Winthrop that he must go to bed at last without the satisfaction of talking with Eastcott, since that gentleman and Mrs. Eastcott had dined with the Governor, and on their return Eastcott had immediately retired for the night.

“ Let it wait till the morning, Win, will you? ” Mrs. Eastcott had said over the room telephone in answer to Winthrop’s request for a word with his uncle. “ He has a horrid headache, and it’s time we were all asleep if we have to travel to-morrow.”

Winthrop was obliged to curb his impatience with what grace he could, and left a note in McNulty’s key box to the effect that the chauffeur was to call up Mr. Hammond the moment he arrived at the hotel. But the old questions, Winthrop found, were ringing in his mind. Who was McNulty? Where did he come from? What was he doing? Suddenly there flashed into his memory that other night in Chicago, when he had dreamed of McNulty’s warning. Events had proved the wisdom of the caution, and there was no doubt that the chauffeur had tried to do the party a

good turn on that occasion. The remembrance of the man's former friendliness complicated his apparent duplicity now.

The thought of Chicago brought Santos again to Winthrop's attention. The conversation with Colonel Deering, forgotten in the developments of the afternoon, had more than hinted at another mystery. What was Santos doing in secret at political meetings in the Apache Canyon? Why did he pretend to be miles away from Santa Fé?

Two mysteries! McNulty and Santos! Winthrop felt as if he were Atlas holding on his shoulders the responsibility of the world.

It was seven o'clock next morning when Eastcott, fully dressed, hurried down the hall to his nephew's room. As he lifted his hand for a peremptory rap the door opened abruptly, and Winthrop himself ran full tilt into his visitor. Winthrop also was dressed for the day.

With a hasty exclamation, Eastcott pushed his nephew back into the room, and closed the door. He gave the other short time for doubt as to the occasion of the matutinal visit.

"The devil's to pay," he exclaimed wrathfully. "McNulty has disappeared!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Winthrop. "I was just going to——"

"Have you seen him since he came in yesterday afternoon?" asked his uncle.

"No! That's what——"

"Neither have I. I didn't get word of any

trouble until I went out to the garage this morning. I was particularly anxious to get off early to-day, and now——” Eastcott struck his palm with clenched fist.

“ I was there at half-past ten. The man said McNulty had gone out to see the sights. That’s what I wanted to speak to you about last night.”

“ He’ll see sights when he gets back right enough,” threatened Eastcott. “ I’ll give him some remarks he’ll remember. We’ve got to go without him. They’ve got a fellow in the garage—a Mexican mechanic—who says he can get the car ready. I’ll give McNulty another hour, and then I’ll get the fellow to work.”

“ Who’s going to drive if McNulty doesn’t come? ”

“ We shall have to get a new man.”

“ But a good chauffeur isn’t found in a day.”

“ I know it.” Eastcott bit his mustache. “ But I’ll find one, never you fear! Such a man’s to be had, and I’ll leave word for McNulty to follow us by train.” He turned on his heel towards the door.

Winthrop laid a hand on his arm. “ I’ve got some news for you—about McNulty.”

Eastcott stared—and continued to stare while Winthrop repeated what Evelyn had seen, and recounted the contents of the letter from Binghamton. But astonishment rapidly gave place to incredulity. John Eastcott’s wrath was never long-lived. Surely Miss Deering had made a *mis-
take*; she was nervous, as was quite natural, and

any man with a beard and black eyes would remind her of her captor. The office at Binghamton had made a mistake too; it was not likely now that anyone would remember with accuracy who had sent a telegram several weeks before. McNulty wasn't as bad as all that; he would probably be back on duty within another hour. A few questions might set matters straight. Anyway, one would soon find out how the wind lay.

For the first time in his life Winthrop was impatient with his uncle's good nature. It seemed to the young man that the case against the chauffeur was clear. The abrupt departure was tacit confession of guilt. Winthrop had no idea that the fellow would return.

An hour passed—two—three—even four hours, and still McNulty was not in evidence. No information could be procured of him, and Eastcott had now unwillingly to admit that the matter looked serious. His original indignation, however, had resolved itself into anxiety, and he was more ready to believe that McNulty had met with some foul play than that the chauffeur was guilty of treachery.

The Deerings had left by rail, soon after breakfast, for the ranch. Since their route lay north of that to be followed by the Eastcotts, they would leave the train at one of the stations along the line and then strike south on horseback in order to make the journey in a day. The ranch was only a little off Eastcott's course, a hundred miles or so beyond the point where it diverged

from the railroad, and the Colonel had promised him large supplies of precious gasoline *en route*.

It was evident that if the Eastcotts wished to get away from Santa Fé that day, they must hire another chauffeur and leave McNulty to follow. While his uncle desperately hunted up a suitable man, Winthrop visited the police station and the hospital; but every effort to trace the missing McNulty proved unavailing.

“He’ll turn up in a couple of days full of contrition for his spree,” said Eastcott with his usual optimism. “I must say I never suspected him of a larky disposition, however. But I owe him a month’s salary, so we’re bound to see him somewhere. Meanwhile I’ve found a good man to take his place.”

Winthrop did not agree with his uncle. He felt that some steps, more definite than the leaving of future addresses with the hotel and hospital, should at once be taken. Not only was McNulty very evidently guilty, but he held the key to much baffling mystery. The man must not be allowed to drop out of sight in this easy fashion. The fact that Evelyn had suffered by McNulty’s intrigues added fuel to Winthrop’s ire. While still observing the letter of his promise to her that no news of her abduction should be made public, he hastily placed the matter in the hands of a private detective, with instructions that his investigations were to be made with the utmost secrecy and their results communicated to no one but *himself*. He told himself that did Evelyn know

the entire situation she would justify him in his action, and he promised himself to confide in her the moment he reached the ranch.

As the automobile, guided by the new chauffeur, swept over the well engineered road that, beyond Santa Fé, wound down the Bajada Mountain, he smiled grimly at his uncle's clumsy answers to Mrs. Eastcott's interrogations.

"There's a pretty Mexican girl, with languorous black eyes, and a short, red skirt, who is at the bottom of the whole trouble," declared Mrs. Eastcott decisively. She had not been informed of the circumstantial evidence which indicated the desperateness of McNulty's character. "Didn't he say he had been in New Mexico before? He has gone off to see his sweetheart, of course."

The Bajada Mountain was but one of the many huge, black masses of lava that stretched for miles across the plain, mute chroniclers of some past volcanic turmoil under which a thousand Herculeans might have lain securely buried for centuries. But in spite of their sinister aspect, the lava cliffs were more friendly than the "Bad Lands," where the roads were little more than ruts, and where at one spot a deep passage was cut through a veritable mountain of sand, as though the path had been made with a gigantic knife. Navajo Indians, trudging behind burros, occasionally passed and stared, wide-eyed, at the automobile. Sometimes they made friendly signs, but nothing could induce Mrs. Eastcott to return the greetings. Yet the women, with their gay-

colored clothes, and the men in moccasins and blankets, with no coverings for their long, black hair save a broad band just above the ears, added much to the picturesqueness of the scene. At the Indian village of Algodones the party saw for the first time that most fickle of all the great streams of America, the Rio Grande—the river that juggles with frontiers and boundary lines—the river which, along its two thousand miles, runs between towering canyon walls, and which is capable, in the freshet season, of mighty floods that swirl and seethe in huge, curling waves and grind to death against the cruel rocks all living things that come in their way. High on the left rose the Sandia Mountain, and by following the course of the river to Bernal and the attenuated settlement of Alameda, the travelers came at last to Albuquerque.

The older section of the town, where the natives had lived for generations in the lazy sunshine, presented the incongruity of a fine old church set amidst narrow, ill-paved streets. But in the modern quarter there was a Chapel of the Rosary set on a hill, and a beautiful “Spanish Mission” hotel that would have redeemed from commonplaceness a much less picturesque spot than Albuquerque. The little chapel and the low, wide building looked out across the yellow plains to the distant, purple peaks as calmly as did the Navajos, who in view of the passerby wove blankets or fashioned heavy, silver rings inlaid *with the Indian’s* favorite turquoise. There was

a rare old palace, with a story stretching back into real antiquity—to the time when zealous friars of the Franciscan order, with gloomy robes and shaven heads, preached to the uncomprehending heathen, painted Fra Angelico angels on puma skin, laboriously wrought in wood figures that depicted the suffering Nazarene, or lettered in French and Latin curious maps of the New World. And beyond, in the neighboring valley of the Rio Grande, were the adobe houses of the Pueblos, who lived in precisely the same manner as did their fathers centuries before the birth of Vaca and Coronado.

To the west of the Rio Grande only apologies for roads greeted the automobilists. There was sand everywhere, and everywhere tales of what might be expected from the notorious quicksands of the River Puerco! But to their own surprise, the travelers presently discovered that they had crossed the dangerous river-bed and climbed the winding trail of the sandy bank in safety. The ford was followed by confusing trails, the great red, sandstone butte of the Cerro Colorado, which peered like a rubicund god across the plain, and by arroyo after arroyo. Sand stretched interminably ahead and tried the springs to their uttermost.

“ I feel like a fly upon the ceiling,” said Eastcott, as the unfortunate machine struggled out of the sixth great “ washout.” “ One must travel in New Mexico to realize one’s utter insignificance in comparison with earth and sky.”

It was the second night out from Santa Fé that the camping outfit, repaired in the Capital, was used for the first time. The tents had been pitched at last, slanted from the sides of the car like wings and topped by the spreading canopy of the tonneau. Mrs. Eastcott, assisted by her nephew, had laid out on a matchlessly white cloth those things that minister to the human palate, and Eastcott had presided over the frying pan on the camp fire. Now the two men smoked silently at their pipes, while the new chauffeur chopped wood to feed the hungry blaze. For minutes that flew into the past like heart beats, with the faint roar of the wind from a canyon in their ears, uncle and nephew played at primeval man and crouched beside the fire as worshipers before their fetish.

Over the top of the tents, with a grotesque resemblance to a huge, potted plant, rose a full, round cedar, against whose dark background the canvas shone ivory white. A lonely rock sentinel, with the fantastic outlines of an earth-bound guardian of the wilderness, glowed in the ineffable, rosy blaze of the dying sunset. To the north, golden tinted buttes and purpling mountains, sandy hollows and red cliffs, that rose like man-made walls from the billowing levels, spread forth a riot of color which the waning day blended softly to exquisite and gentle harmonies. For the poverty of New Mexican vegetation, Nature had made up a thousandfold in color. She had planted *a wondrous flower garden of rocks and hills.*



"Only apologies for roads greeted the automobilists."

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Two lank-haired Indians passed the camp, pausing to stare at the strange denizens of the far-off cities—the creatures who took power from the fires of the skies. They spoke in soft Queres words that rolled sonorously from their gnarled throats. Then they trudged on. Civilization—the cruel, grasping, selfish civilization of the City where trivialities became insistent—seemed immeasurably remote and unreal.

Winthrop was suddenly conscious of a passionate kinship with the wilderness. All the youth that throbbed in his veins went out in answer to it; he felt as if he shook off years of his life and returned to the untrammelled days of his boyhood; New York was in another planet. The hand of Time, which dealt so gently with the pansy-purple hills, was laid upon him to draw him with soft insistence back into the heart of a half-forgotten but well-loved world. As the light faded and the scene took on the evanescent aspect of a fairy land, Eastcott roused himself and approached one of the tents.

“What in the world—my dear? I feel like a bull in a china shop! Where did all this elegance come from?” Winthrop was remotely conscious of his uncle’s astonished voice.

“From the automobile! What did you suppose I had in all those nice parcels and boxes which you have been fussing over ever since we left New York?” was the reply.

“Whew-w!” Winthrop could divine his uncle’s amusement. “And I thought we were to

rough it! Win, you there? Come in, won't you, and have a look at the show? "

Winthrop ambled to the open flap of the Eastcotts' tent. The tiny space within was lighted by two pink candles which stood in metal holders, one on either side of what was unmistakably the dressing table. That this luxury was but a clever combination of the automobile trunk and of the wooden box in which the cooking utensils had been packed, detracted nothing from the elegance of its white cover and the array of toilet articles which Mrs. Eastcott was spreading forth with housewifely concern. Two small mattresses laid on cedar boughs close by, had immaculate sheets; there was a rug on the canvas flooring, and on another white-covered box stood a small aluminium pitcher and basin that shone like silver in the flickering candle light. Winthrop echoed his uncle's whistle of astonishment.

"What a 'bully' little room! You'd better not let any chance Mexicans or Indians see it, Aunt Nell, or you might have to part with some of your magnificence," he said.

"There's nothing here of any value except the toilet things," explained Mrs. Eastcott. "After all, gold-mounted brushes in the wilderness are not any more incongruous than an automobile."

Nevertheless when, as they all sat around the camp fire, the heavenly night shut down upon the earth, and the stars came out in the violet sky—*when the wind died to the softest whisper, and a*

dark phantom suddenly appeared from the gloom, the men thought instantly of the treasures of the little tent-room. A Mexican—a stranger—stood beyond the blaze, and another and larger phantom appeared to hang at a distance in the shadows.

The campers around the fire sprang to their feet.

The man saluted in Spanish with elaborate signs of friendliness, and there was nothing to be done but to give him welcome in the custom of the country. Eastcott's eyes, however, hardly left the strange face, and he held his gun conspicuously in the crook of his arm.

The stranger asked only for the freedom of the fire, and made it evident that the phantom that loomed in the distance was nothing more formidable than his native Mexican wagon. He unhitched his horses, hobbled them, and turned them loose. Then he brought a kettle and, filling it with water, set it over the fire. After he had spread his blankets on the ground near the blaze, he went to the wagon again, and unearthed from its depths a small, fat bundle which proved to be his son.

With a cry of delight, Mrs. Eastcott stretched her arms out toward the child, who, prodded by his smiling father, walked timidly up to her low camp chair. The conversation consisted mainly of signs interlarded by an occasional Spanish word from Eastcott and a broad grin of satisfaction on the dark, unshaven face of the Mexican. Presently the visitor took his boy and, rolling the four-year-old and himself in the blankets, went uncon-

cernedly to rest under the canopy of the night before the fire.

“ You think he is really friendly, John? ” whispered Mrs. Eastcott anxiously in the candle-lighted tent.

“ I certainly do, my dear! Didn’t like the fellow’s looks at first, but when I saw the wagon and the child, I came to the conclusion he was as harmless a traveler as ourselves.”

“ And—and—John, I heard a dreadful, long howling noise a little while ago. Do you suppose it was a lion? ”

“ More likely a coyote! Sounds a bit dismal in the darkness, doesn’t it? But you’re not afraid? ”

“ Oh, no—no! I—I don’t suppose the coyote will come up to the tent to-night, will he? ”

“ Probably not, so long as the fire burns! And if he did he’d dine off the Mexican and the kiddie before he got around to us. You don’t need to worry, dear! ”

Mrs. Eastcott shuddered. “ Oh, the poor baby! I can’t help thinking he would be safer in the wagon. The bears——”

“ Now, now, Nell! Haven’t we got a fire as I said, and rifles into the bargain?—Mind you don’t touch mine over there!—Win and I will be up and down all night and browsing around to see that all’s well. You can go to bed and sleep like a Christian.”

Nevertheless Mrs. Eastcott secretly tucked the precious gold mirrors and brushes from her violet-leather traveling-bag under her pillow for safe-

keeping, and lay awake for an hour listening for the Mexican's prowling steps, and trembling as the occasional voice of a coyote sounded in a long-drawn wail through the night.

But long after she had dropped into a fitful slumber Winthrop continued to smoke beside his tent. Before him rose the profile of the sentinel-rock, deep indigo now in the firelit darkness; above him, across the field of the heavens, wheeled the splendid constellation of the plow. Now and then the Mexican stirred uneasily, and as if by force of habit unrolled himself from his blankets, and mechanically replenished the fire. His face was as serene and simple as the child's, though without doubt he knew straitened means, hard, unceasing toil, and many cares. But his struggles had been less bitter than the sordid, soul-destroying poverty of the cities and the bitter fight for work of the crowded streets.

Stories that for days had been floating in half nebulous memories through Winthrop's mind crystallized into historic fact—stories of youthful reading which had begun with the semi-barbarous empire of the Montezumas and the coming of Cortez, and had ended with the annexation of New Mexico to the United States. The Easterner thought of the Conquistadores and of the Pueblo empire of the Aztecs, spreading out in triumph back to the North of its barbaric and obscure origins, of the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola, the Fountain of Eternal Youth, and Indian slaves of the treasure mines which enriched the Spanish

Philip, of the tender, humane Padres who engrafted the precepts of Christian pity upon a moribund Paganism, of the terrors of the Holy Inquisition, and the romantic but pathetic figure of the Pocahontas of Mexico, the Aztec maiden Malintza. What a fountain of literary inspiration was here to immortalize its chronicler, and beside which "The Cid" itself might well pale into insignificance! Why had no writer ever grasped the magnitude of an endless theme that had the magical fascination of "The Thousand and One Nights" and all the ingredients of a noble epic? New York might draw its inspirations from the crude materialism of the present, but the Southwest was a world that had stood still in listless vegetativeness in order to preserve what it had inherited from Spain—that romantic spirit which was once the common possession of Christendom. For days now he had met graceful creatures bearing musical names of sweet meaning, he had caught the subtle essence of Espagna in old palace walls, and had seen ancient cities decked with its slowly fading charms. There were still men and women who spoke the Spanish language, and who were of that *sangre azul* brought so long ago into Spain by the wild Goths. Winthrop remembered that he had heard that the indomitable Cortez had had gray eyes, and that Alvarado had been distinguished by his blue ones and by his golden beard. Strange, Saxon fairness—vanishing link with the Northern tribes to which Southern Europe owes *its strongest* characteristics! Strange, new, age-

old land of the Southwest, that few Americans even yet knew how to value!

Again, in the vast, starry beauty of the lonely night there swept over Winthrop that feeling of kinship for the wilderness. And as if the sensation were some magic key, it suddenly unlocked for him the portals to Evelyn's soul. Phrases, sentences that had before hinted to him of a remote, uncomprehended world became illumined; vague emotions, vaguer dreams stood now half-revealed. If to no man is it given to wholly know the soul of woman, in this moment to Winthrop more than to most lovers was it permitted to understand. For the wilderness was his teacher, and the lessons of the wilderness are broad and simple. To him as to her, spoke the primeval solitudes and beauty, space, leisure, rest. Life became purified, uncomplicated, a thing of glory and matchless grandeur. Great emotions, lofty purposes, noble deeds, were reality; trivialities and meanness but the shadow that hid the truth. The Infinite bent low to man. And man looked up, till behold; the Infinite and man were one!

As in the Dog Canyon, Winthrop had clasped Evelyn's form, so now his spirit held hers close in a new and illuminating sympathy. All her love of beauty, her hunger for poetry and romance, her swift responsiveness to light and color, her dreams of service, her sweet, child gayety were wrapped in the warm embrace of his comprehension and worship. She had been dear; she became now a treasure so exquisite that he trembled at

the very thought of her in the hush of the velvet night. The law of the wilderness made woman a dependent; even the Indian had stood guard over his squaw. A fleeting vision of the Eastcotts' tent, decorated with the pink candles and the glittering toilet brushes, came to him, and the little attempt at home-making that had amused him with its inappropriateness touched him now to a strange worship. Woman, the dependent, needed protection, but the white woman, in her turn, stood guard over all that was best and noblest in man.

A coyote called from the distance. An owl floated past on down-muffled wings, and alighted noiselessly as a ball of thistledown in the cedar. Winthrop knocked the ashes out of his pipe and lay down in his tent, where he could see the flames sputtering among the dark green' boughs. But sleep did not come. He remembered that as a child on Christmas nights he had watched the crackling logs from the vantage ground of the hearth rug. The scent of the wood filled his nostrils. Life was too sweet to yield it even temporarily to oblivion.

With his eyes on the flickering blaze he forgot McNulty and the anxieties of the last forty-eight hours, and let himself dream of love. Whatever happened, whether Evelyn's eyes at Pecos had held uncertainty or denial, whether she married him or not, nothing could completely separate them in spirit now. The wilderness had admitted him to its Holy of Holies; at last he understood *her too* well, he thought, for distance or silence

to ever wholly sunder them. A month ago he had desired that Evelyn should smile only for him, that she should dress for him, see men only through his eyes. In the lonely night, with the call of the coyote in his ears, and the sentinel-rock pointing to the stars, such desire seemed childishly incomplete. He knew now that love was more than longing for possession; it was comprehension, longing to aid, to enrich, to bless! It was life surrendered and life won—the death of self.

The sun was hardly risen next morning when Winthrop sauntered into the open, but the Mexican and his wheeled craft had already slipped away like “ships that pass in the night.” Cold heaps of ashes marked the spot where the fire had glowed, and tinted clouds floated across the Eastern sky.

Eastcott believed that with luck he might make the Deering ranch that day, but the trails were confusing and sandy, and there was a likelihood of having to camp once more. He had taken data as to the journey, both from the local authorities at Santa Fé and from the Colonel, but no one was in possession of an actual “log” of the complete route.

Tents were taken down, and the paraphernalia of the camp packed snugly away on the automobile with as much expedition and as little confusion as possible. Within an hour of the early picnic breakfast the party was under way across the plains.

Near Laguna Pueblo the country became dotted

with rugged, red sandstone cliffs rising to great heights, and past the pueblo flowed the San José River, the clear, sparkling waters dancing in the sunlight as it hurried on its course to join the parent stream. A soft, azure mist enveloped the neighboring hills like a mantle of transparent gauze, through which the varied tints upon nature's palette shone with a subdued but ethereal glow.

This portion of New Mexico appeared to be almost wholly given over to the Indians, whose villages were connected by sandy trails crossed by many deep arroyos and adobe flats, and at one point traversed by a wide but shallow ford. Dark eyes, full of questioning, were fixed on the travelers as they passed, and the pictures presented by native costume and coloring were as vivid as any to be found in the peasant villages of the remote corners of Europe. Squaws, wrapped in white blankets which reached to their knees, their legs encased in stiff, stovepipe leggings of white and their feet in moccasins, carried papooses slung over their bowed backs. Their hair was long and straight, without ornament, and they wore no head coverings save those formed by corners of their blankets. The men strutted about in similar blankets and moccasins, fringed trousers, and soft felt hats. In the center of some of the villages stood a forlorn Indian church that but for the cross and bell surmounting the gable over the entrance, might from appearance have been an *ancient* storehouse or fortress. Often an old hag

squatted by the doorway with the eleemosynary eye and the outstretched arm of her beggar kind in Europe. Once the party stopped the automobile, and stepped for a moment into the deserted building. The interior proved to be nothing more than a large, bare room with a cemented floor on which there were no signs of seats. The side walls of the edifice, however, were adorned throughout their length with small crosses alternated with candlesticks and pictures of the saints. The altar was ornamented with pictures of Christ, candles, and holy images, and a rude, wooden railing divided it from the rest of the church. On the rafters overhead were goodly-sized logs, their flat undersides decorated with crude pictures of bear and buffalo hunted by Indians. The room was dimly lit by narrow windows, and the travelers were glad to hurry from the oppressive and sepulchral atmosphere back into the open air.

Here and there, however, along the Trail there were signs that civilization was creeping in among the Indians. The hand of reform had touched lightly the dismal, bat-haunted, earthen houses in which generations had lived and died. Yet the American habitation of wood, as primitive in material as the adobe hut but modern in its comforts, was stealing a march on the aboriginal and, with the white farmers and the school teachers, was preaching of healthy discontent and of progress. Occasionally Indians, Mexicans, and half-breeds were to be seen living side by side in newly built, rectangular, cottage homes, the adobe of the

walls trimmed to the regularity and neatness of concrete. Commonplace in the extreme as edifices, each with its door and shuttered window and the common stove outside, these homes were never without a certain picturesqueness. Huge, red chillis, like mighty, flaming catskins or fox-tails, adorned the front walls, where cool grays and greens lingered lovingly, to be repeated in the sloping sides of the scrub-covered valley and cliffs. A gorgeous Navajo blanket, carelessly thrown down with gigantic melons and squashes, or the overhanging tawny-brown corn in the cob, made an impromptu color feast in still life that captivated the eye. Sometimes there was the odd incongruity of a store, kept by a recently adopted Hebraic son of Uncle Sam, who pattered unmistakable Yiddish and dickered with the Indians as he might have dickered with Polish peasants at home. Then Uncle Sam himself appeared in the shape of the official farmer, stationed by a paternal government to teach the natives scientific farming.

Before Cubero, the Trail grew exceedingly rough, leading across an abominable adobe flat and along an irrigation canal to the Indian village of Paraji. Here it swung north along the base of a rocky mountain, flanked by a large, black lava hill. The sand had given place to a causeway of solid rock strewn with broken boulders. Dwarf cedar bushes scattered themselves over the undulations, growing out of mounds of stone that looked like great fantastic turtle-shells. Bizarre *drinking cups* and gigantic troughs had been

scooped out by the surface rain-water of centuries. Wheels left no tracks and made no dust. But progress was slow, and gasoline, the *aqua vitæ* of the automobile, was getting low. With reasonable luck there was a possibility of reaching the Deering ranch late that afternoon, and the Colonel had promised to send out his own car to meet the Transcontinentalists and to act as pilot over trails that were difficult and rather confusing. Any hard "bucking" at sandy river-beds or strenuous efforts to get in and out of dry "washes," might exhaust the precious fluid in the tanks and in the reserve cans. However, the Colonel's automobile, once met, would have a liberal supply on board, and Eastcott hoped for the best as he crossed the open mesa.

Under the shadow of a huge cliff was a broken, irregular line of adobe Indian huts. Officially this was nothing more than a station on the railroad in charge of a cheerful Hibernian.

"How much gasoline have you?" asked Eastcott anxiously.

"Six quarts, sorr," exclaimed the Irishman vivaciously. He might have been speaking of so much whisky.

"And how far is Deering's ranch from here?" asked Eastcott.

The Hibernian looked shrewdly at the car, then at the rugged cliffs above the adobe huts.

"A matter of ninety miles, sorr, but I'm thinkin' you'd do better to make it in a flyin' machine!"

Mrs. Eastcott, who was not intended to overhear the conversation, wondered miserably what had possessed the Colonel to select a ranch in so inaccessible a part of the country.

“ You’ll have no difficulty in knowin’ the right trail, sorr,” continued the cheerful Irishman. “ There’s a lot of freightin’ done by teams from that ther’ ranch, and them wheel ruts’ll be there on judgment day, shure.”

Fifty miles, and Colonel Deering’s pilot car would surely appear! Bad roads were becoming too constant a factor in the landscape now to be any longer feared, and Eastcott was possessed of a vast enthusiasm for his task. But how was he to find the right trail, in order to meet his host’s guide?

“ Ye’ll hit it with a compass better’n I can tell ye,” replied the station master. “ There ain’t no finger posts to speak of except a dead hoss or two, and they don’t last as guides. As near as I can say yer goes straight ahead out of here for a few miles, lettin’ nothin’ turn ye from yer purpose. Then yer fights shy of a right fork till yer comes to the next one, a matter of three or four miles more, when yer takes a first turn left, keeps on persevarin’, and then takes a right fork at the fifteenth milestone, which don’t exist, after which it’s look out for chuck holes and God help yer, for it’s more’n I can, shure! ”

Eastcott groaned.

The Irishman looked at the car which was “ *chugging* ” amidst the group of children which

had collected in dangerous proximity to the wheels. "It's the first outfit of the kind I seen come through here. Can it cloimb?"

"Yes!"

The Irishman looked dubious. "Whin I says 'cloimb' I mean can it shin up out of an arroyo or a barranca and do stunts?"

"Nothing has 'phased' it yet," said Eastcott.

"Humph! It's cruelty to animals all the same, whin it gets them elegant rubber toes diggin' into the malapais and the rock-chunks out there in the alkali country. Guess yer'll never know where it's going to jump next whin it gets its rubbers on some o' them slides. It's a foine counthry yer're goin' through, sorr, but ye'd best see it in an 'oiler's' schooner with a couple of old *caballos*. If thet ther' machine will take my advice it'll put in a heap of spare time lettin' that trail alone."

Mrs. Eastcott had beckoned some of the Indian children into the tonneau, and a big, dark-haired boy had clambered up beside the chauffeur. It was the first time they had ever seen an automobile. Eastcott regarded the group absently.

As he considered what was to be done, Winthrop came up with disconcerting news. "I'll be hanged, Uncle, if I can find a way out of this hole. There's an unbridged arroyo right in the village itself! Only a few poles in place which nothing but a donkey could cross."

The Irishman was busy scratching his name and address upon the tonneau of the car. "It's a

bad trick they have, sorr, of writin' their names on yer purty machine. No, sorr; I'm thinkin' I was right when I doubted yer hoss was good for stunts. Yer ain't got to worry about bridges in this part of the world but just jump 'em; all the same there's a way round, sorr, a matter of a mile or so."

The road led into a rough and mountainous country. The Irishman had spoken of this as the "main road," but the Celtic imagination must have had full play, for the promised wheel ruts, at first easily discernible, soon grew fainter and fainter, and at last all but disappeared. There seemed nothing to do but to plod on in the glowing sunlight of the perfect November afternoon. Cedar bushes dotted the landscape, and an occasional, stunted tree branched from the dried grass as if deprived of trunk by some malicious dwarfed enemy who would suit its height to his own. Sometimes the tiny *val de verde* and the prickly pear cactus were to be seen, but the region could boast more of color than of vegetation. On all sides the soil blended deep reds with rose and white, and the rocks massed their pale greens and pinks against the grays of the cliff-like hills. A stream that flowed swiftly, eddying as it passed, toward the sun-parched South, sent flashes of silver light to meet the golden sunshine.

The automobile had been traveling for some time along a downward, winding path. Eastcott, whose expression was eloquent of doubt, at last jumped down. "It doesn't seem to me that we're

on the right road," he said. "We ought to be headed southwest, and so far as I can make out from this winding track, we're going dead southeast." He looked again at the notes he had gathered from Colonel Deering and the Irishman. "These trails are not shown on my maps. The only thing we can do is to go on till we make sure of our general bearing. If we find we are wrong, perhaps someone will put us right. It's just possible there is a trail which will save our going all the way back to the station."

As the car picked its way down the incline, Mrs. Eastcott gave a sudden, warning cry. The chauffeur applied the brakes. To all appearance the road had ended on the very edge of a precipice.

It was the work of a moment to brace the front wheels with stones as a precaution against any sudden weakness of the brakes.

"A narrow squeak," said Eastcott with a forced laugh. "I'd have spared you the shock, Nell!"

"It's only a hair-pin turn, after all," shouted Winthrop, who had run on ahead. "The road's not bad, and it goes down into the valley somewhere."

When the chauffeur had worked the machine backward into safety, uncle and nephew explored the slope.

"I wouldn't take a chance like that again with your aunt in the car for a million dollars," said Eastcott as they walked to a kind of rocky platform, from which they hoped that a view of the

surrounding country would give them some clue as to their whereabouts.

They were not disappointed. Below the ledge there spread a scene that struck the travelers breathless with astonishment and awe. A tremendous "kettle," surrounded toward horizon by precipitous cliffs of dull red and yellow sandstone, stretched a wide expanse of gleaming billowy plains. And in the center of the "kettle" as though cut by the chisel of the gods, rose a mighty rock or mesa that seemed to fairly upbraid the cloudless blue sky.

"It's the Mesa Encantada!" said Eastcott in a hushed voice. "And there on the lower rim is Acoma, the sky village of the Pueblos!"



"It's the Mesa Encantada," said Eastcott in a hushed voice."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE first view of the valley had stunned Winthrop into an oblivion of all but the majesty of the scene before him. He was gazing, as through a soothsayer's crystal, upon the strangest fragment of a world that he had ever seen or imagined. Had he become suddenly a contemporary of Adam himself? Was this a seared, though still beautiful Eden—a spot that had served its age, worn out, and isolated itself for the rest of time?

Winthrop stood motionless before the panorama—this world that had been pocketed between the tinted mountains for centuries, and whose sudden appearance to him now seemed hardly less wonderful than would the conjuring of the land of the Pharaohs out of the sleep of the ages. From the vantage point of the precipitous divide, or plateau, upon which he stood, he could see that the valley below extended for many miles. The mesa in the center, imposing, gigantic, a ponderous tower of red sandstone set amidst dim rainbows, rose a thousand feet sheer above the plains. Several miles to the right stood another mass of broken rock, less than half as high, and sloping gradually to the levels. From his uncle's exclamation Winthrop knew that on the top of this second and lower mesa stood the aged adobe

houses of Acoma—a pueblo old even when the Spaniards invaded the Western world. No sign of habitation, however, was visible at this distance in the afternoon light. A solitary horseman riding across the lengthening shadows of the plains was the only sign of life in the valley. Winthrop was conscious of an overpowering sense of tragedy and loneliness. The region might have been devastated by the Flood when the heavenly fiat decreed the destruction of the seed of men. There was little or no verdure to soften the landscape, savagely hacked and torn asunder by the forces of Nature, and weathered into a thousand grim shapes whose beauty served to emphasize their cruelty. It seemed impossible that the lonely assembly of crag and precipice, centered by the dizzy air-island of the great mesa, could be an integral part of his own country.

He knew that for centuries a tawny race of Indians was supposed to have dwelt on the summit of the Enchanted Rock isolated from the world and its kind. Beside that ancient, vanished Acoma, which had perched cloud-high on the towering sandstone mesa, this “modern” Acoma, toward which he strained his eyes, was but an infant yet in the swaddling clothes of immaturity. Tradition ran that a steep, narrow path had once led to the summit up the perpendicular side of the Enchanted Mesa—a rude stone ladder, fashioned as by giants—a rocky boulder poised in mid air and slanting to another steep *and stony* passage. Thus had the peaceful

Pueblos remained safe in their stronghold from their age-old foes of the plains, the Apaches. Could not one sentinel keep at bay, indefinitely, an advancing army that must creep, man by man, along the dangerous boulder in single file? When the day came that a Pueblo lad must be left to guard the three sick women of the adobe village while the tribe went many miles across the plains to the harvest, there was no thought that any danger could befall the mesa eyrie. Yet left alone, the boy, proud of his responsibility, had provided against possible attack. He had collected a pile of stones in a niche at the top of the rocky ladder below the boulder, and had watched there each night for the enemies who might think to take advantage of the absence of the tribe. The stones would have crashed down on the first venturesome head that dared show itself over the edge of the precipitous "stairway."

At last had come a night of fearful storm. Never had the clouds above New Mexico poured forth such floods of rain. A river had dashed down the narrow path over the rocks, and the boy guardian had been nearly washed away as he crept downward to his pile of stones. The cliffs had seemed to totter. Would the wind and the rain topple the whole great table-rock over to the plains? The boy's query had been answered by a terrific crash that echoed through the storm-swept hills and that must have reached to the ears of the great Montezuma himself as he waited in the Indian's heaven for the appointed hour of his

return to his stricken people. And when hours later daylight had come, there in the valley lay the shattered boulder that had formed the pathway to the Pueblo village. The boy was safe at the foot of the yawning gap. But the adobe houses and the women were far above. No human being could reach them. Swiftly the boy had set out for the harvest fields, distant three days' journey. Swiftly the Indians had returned with him to view the terrible ruin. And as they looked up—up to the village beyond their reach, three women appeared on the edge of the cliff, wringing their hands, and motioning to the tribe below. But it was of no use to make ladders, of no use to strive to climb the rock. No ladder man ever made could reach to that dizzy height. No feet could find a resting place now on the precipitous cliff. Though the women below had shrieked to those above, and the men had wept bitter, agonized tears, there was nothing to be done, no help to offer. At last, one day, but two women came to the edge of the cliff above the yellow plain. Next day there was but one. She was the mother of the lad who had been left to guard the pueblo. As the tribe had gazed, she had staggered forward and, spreading her arms wide, like wings, she had sprung into the sunny, wind-swept space.

When Winthrop looked back at last to the rocky platform on which he stood, his uncle had brought Mrs. Eastcott down the trail to see the view.

“Do you remember Doré's pictures of the sub-

limity and grandeur of Babylonian architecture, Nell? ” Eastcott was saying.

“ Yes,” she answered almost solemnly. “ But no Doré is great enough in imagination to paint the Enchanted Mesa, is he, John? ”

He shook his head. “ You will not think it so beautiful, dear, when I tell you that we shall have to camp somewhere around here to-night. I know now we’re a long way south of our trail, and that there’s no possibility of our getting to the ranch till to-morrow. Deering said the pilot would make himself comfortable in his car and wait till we came along.”

Mrs. Eastcott suppressed a sigh. “ Very well; the pink candles are not burned down yet! ” she said cheerfully.

“ I have heard that the modern pueblo of Acoma is rather a show place and more or less accustomed to visitors. I move we set out over that trail across the valley there and go to roost under its wing. What do you say, Win? ”

As the trio retraced their steps to the car there was a soft, thudding sound on the sandy path, and two Indians, on small, lithe ponies, approached from the direction from which the automobile had come. One of them all recognized as a handsome fellow whom they had seen at the store at Laguna. As Eastcott saluted in Mexican fashion, the men halted.

In broken Spanish and sign language the automobilist explained that he and his party were seeking the pueblo. The Indians, in their turn,

haltingly made it clear that they were going to the pueblo and would act as guides. They were evidently traders and more used to the town than to pueblo life, for though undoubtedly of the tribe, they wore the garb of civilization, even to the wide sombrero. Conventionality had robbed them of their picturesqueness—such is the demoralizing effect of the Jewish “clo’man” even in the Southwest!

The shadows of the late afternoon were deepening in the valley as the travelers crossed the plains to the village supposed to have been built by the Indians after the disaster that made untenable their ancient city of the skies on the Mesa Encantada. A golden haze softened the outlines of the crags and pinnacles, and the automobile glided through a wonderland of weathered rocks, of suspended columns, and natural bridges, of Egyptian pylons, of marvelous results of erosion, and of cleavages in rosy and russet sandstone, separated by the greenish grays and dull yellows of sand and faded grasses. The path led directly to the pueblo of Acoma, which, perched on the summit of a table rock with precipitous slopes of shifting sands, rose a few miles away.

“We should have thought this wonderful enough, I suppose,” said Eastcott, “if the other mesa were not there in full view.”

The visitors left the automobile with the chauffeur among the sand dunes, and climbed the winding trail on foot to the village of the air. Except for the wonder of its position and its superb set-

ting amidst the painted hills, it differed little from other pueblos. Three long rows of adobe houses, divided by rocky streets, ran in regular, parallel lines across the top of the table-land. There was no architectural grace in these terraced houses that had been built of adobe brought painfully on men's backs up the narrow cliff path so many hundreds of years before. One might have fancied they had taken a lesson from the small creatures of the wild and adopted a protective coloring—a dull and ashen grayness, not unlike the tints of the mesa itself. Yet open doors and small, crude windows revealed rude partitions that divided the houses within into a semblance of those of the White Man's ancestors. At one end of the pueblo and close to the edge of the cliff stood the deserted, old Spanish church gazing out across a view of plains and hills.

The people of the pueblo regarded the visitors with indifference, though they dodged away from Winthrop's camera until nickels and dimes made it worth their while to remain. Lithe, young bucks strode past with the grace of Greek youths. Women crouched over conical, clay ovens built in the "streets"; bright-eyed children played by the adobe doorways, the little girls burdened with smaller brothers and sisters whom they carried on their backs in shawls. Old crones squatted against the clay walls, their eyes as dull and vacant as those of the Sphinx, their ears apparently forever closed to any message from the outer

world. Now and then a solitary figure climbed a tottering ladder to a platform of one of the three-story houses, and disappeared within the hovel-like rooms. Once a procession of women and boys came from the cliff path with jars of water, brought from the plains below, balanced on their heads.

“*Lo que puedo!*” Winthrop thought of the Spanish motto as he looked into the stolid, peaceful faces. The Pueblos were the embodiment of the proverb—“that which can be is enough,”—the indifferent content with the present and with that easy life which is one long day-dream. The human need provided—the granary full, and the streams below giving ample drink to the thirsty fields—what more could humanity claim? Life’s pace was the gait of the dozing donkey which even then plodded within the shadow of the adobe, the veritable spirit of New Mexico. Here was a race, half-Pagan, half-Christian, semi-savage, yet docile and honest, that in spite of nearly four centuries of contact with the White Man lived as conservative a life as that of the ancient Egyptians. For the first time, in the presence of these autochthones, Winthrop felt uncomfortably like an interloper. Yet civilization itself was also an interloper among these Children of the Sun whose life was so anomalous, so utterly unconcerned with modern conditions that if the rest of humanity were to become extinct to-morrow it would remain entirely unaffected. If they awaited the return of Montezuma, as historians had said, the prophet would



"Close to the edge of the cliff stood the deserted old church of Acoma."

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have no difficulty in recognizing the people he had left so long ago.

The two Pueblos in white man's garb, who did the honors of Acoma, explained that the cacique was away in the fields below with most of his men. It was a pity the strangers had not arrived the week before, for then there had been a feast day, with processions, dances in the plaza, and the game of "Gallo," or hunting the buried cock on horseback. Did the strangers wish any pottery, for which Acoma was famous?

It was Winthrop who cut the cedar boughs for the campfire that night, whistling the while the melody that accompanies the lines, "Come back to your Mother, ye children, for shame!" The long sweeps of the ax were his response to the call of Nature, to the primitive which lurks somewhere in all men. With the dynamics of chopping was mingled the whole "art" of the Simple Life, so much talked of by the people of the cities, and so little understood that it still remains an "art."

Under the protective wing of a huge bluff of sandstone carved by wind and weather into bizarre grotesqueness, supper was a feast of the gods. Not the least of Eastcott's accomplishments was the ability to act as chef. There was canned plenty in the larder of the automobile, and with the skill of an old camper he contrived in a short time to concoct a variety of savory substantials. With the two great, acetylene lamps of the car shining like miniature suns and turning the sands

into surfaces of ivory white, the natural dining-room, whose walls were the deepening shadows of the night, became a scene of good cheer and mild revelry.

Above, the long line of dun-colored, terraced walls, rising weirdly to the skies from the tableland, grew dimmer and dimmer, until it floated in a soft, indigo haze. The blurred houses, at first rugged scoriations pierced by black holes like eyeless sockets, melted away till they became but a part of the mysterious, mesa walls.

"I shouldn't mind seeing McNulty again," said Eastcott confidentially as, the remnants of the supper cleared away, he watched the new chauffeur in the light of the lamps lazily "groom" the car. "This fellow isn't much good at anything but saving his own hide, or else he's got a touch of the New Mexican *mañana*. It's as much as one's life is worth to get him to lift a finger round the camp, eh, Win?"

"Poor McNulty!" sighed Mrs. Eastcott. "Perhaps he will be at the ranch waiting for us with a Mexican bride. John,"—she leaned forward in her camp chair—"isn't there someone moving along that ledge just above us?"

Eastcott, who was stretched at his wife's feet before the fire, rose on his elbow to peer into the night.

"Nonsense, Nell!" he said reassuringly. "Of there's nothing there."

thoughts went slowly back to
in the shadow of Acoma, the

whilom chauffeur and his intrigues seemed shadowy figments of another world.

Suddenly Eastcott reached for his gun. He, also, had become possessed of a sense that someone was watching. "I believe I've got an attack of nerves, too," he apologized. "But I'll wager there's someone prowling around here."

As he jumped to his feet two Indians appeared, pausing within a short distance of the camp. The firelight illuminated their dark faces, but for any movement they made they might have been statues or ghosts of the Indians' after-world which peoples the dark canyons and passes.

The White Men waited for the intruders to make the first move toward friendliness or hostility. After some moments the taller of the Indians said "Ho!" in a guttural voice and approached the fire. "Tiene tobacco?" he asked politely, and he and his companion squatted down with easy familiarity. As Eastcott held out his tobacco pouch there was no enmity in the men's eyes, nor any of that cunning which might have been expected in the glance of members of the horse-stealing race to which they belonged. For the taller Indian was evidently a Navajo, about sixty years old, dressed in fringed trousers and moccasins of skin from which the hair had not been removed. He had a broad fillet around his forehead, and in spite of the chill of the autumn evening he wore a flannel shirt without coat or blanket. The younger man was apparently of the same tribe, for he was similarly dressed, with the addi-

tion of a blanket and a rifle which he carried as nonchalantly as a woman carries a fan.

The spokesman slowly drew from his flimsy shirt a handful of corn shucks and tossed them in the fire. Then his eyes roamed leisurely over the little camp, taking in its details with dull approval. When his glance came to the automobile, he grunted and pointed out the strange carriage to his friend.

"*Caballos?*" he asked, looking about with a puzzled air.

Eastcott laughed. "No horse," he explained. "Go by light; so!" He struck a spark from a match.

The Indians stared at him and then at the car.

"Ride?" they said.

"Yes! Ride long way."

"Squaw push? Squaw carry?"

"No! Squaw ride, too!"

Nobody spoke again for what might have been twenty minutes. The Indians blinked at the fire. The campers looked at the Indians. It was clear the car had set the callers a mental problem which they neither understood nor cared to discuss. The chauffeur finished his task and stretched himself before the blaze.

At last there was a distant barking of dogs, which rose to a chorus of excitement and then died away. The Indians paid no attention to the sound. But the chauffeur, used to the nomads of New Mexico, explained that there was a flock of sheep in the neighborhood in charge of the

dogs. Probably the skulking herd of coyotes which usually accompanied such a flock, had made a dash for their prey. It wasn't a bad guess, either, he said, to suspect that these chaps by the fire were the shepherds.

There was another interminable silence. Presently Eastcott began to talk in a low voice, bringing forth from the treasure house of his memory stories of his early experience in the West—the kind of stories that go with every campfire, tales of adventure, of life in the open beneath the sun and the stars.

“Tired, Nell?” he asked at last, glancing surreptitiously at his watch. “It's nearly ten o'clock. There's no need for you to sit up to entertain these Indian gentlemen. Why don't you go into the tent and get to bed?”

But Mrs. Eastcott refused. She felt uneasy so long as the visitors remained. “Do—do you think they will stop all night, as the Mexican did?” she asked drowsily.

“Not if they've got flocks somewhere in the neighborhood. They're just making a call.”

The Indians were crouched by the fire in exactly the same position in which they had seated themselves over an hour before. Except for the puffs of smoke from their pipes, the campers might have believed them to be wrapped in slumber. Winthrop rose and paced back and forth. But the shepherds did not take the hint.

“They're good for two hours yet,” he said to his uncle and aunt, secure in the guests' non-

comprehension of his remarks. "Do you remember the story, in the history book, of old Massasoit, the chief who took such a fancy to the Pilgrims that he used to arrive at Plymouth with an escort of warriors, and confer his society for days at a time on the long-suffering colonists? They didn't dare be anything but cordial, but they were driven to their wits' end to entertain the fellows."

"If Massasoit and his warriors were as giddy conversationalists as these chaps the colony must have had a ripping time of it!" commented Eastcott dryly. "Can anybody think of a way of hinting to our friends that we've had a long ride to-day and want to say 'good-night'?"

No one had any suggestion unless it was Winthrop, who poked a potato, forgotten from the camp supper, out of the ashes and presented it politely to the taller of the Indians. The Navajo grunted and stuck the offering into his shirt.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Eastcott. "It'll be like a steam radiator for the poor devil."

Conversation, even among the campers, languished. Mrs. Eastcott nodded, her head falling forward at last in an uncomfortable doze.

Winthrop, in the silence, was acutely conscious of the unseen presence of the Mesa Encantada—gigantic tombstone of a half-forgotten past. The men of old who could have dwelt in such lofty solitudes must have been majestic creatures, he thought, or they would have been awed into pigmies by the grandeur of their environment. He *caught his breath*. What would happen could

this age-old Mesa of Enchantment be transferred, by some strange magic, to the portals of prosaic New York? He fancied the Mayor issuing a command that each citizen should gaze upon the unearthly loveliness of Acoma for an allotted period each day. The social "Four Hundred," divorcees, politicians whose hands were none too clean, shrewd, nervous business men—gamblers alike with health and with dollars—tired working women, little children—what would be the effect of Acoma on all these? Would New York at the end of ten, twenty years, be better, purer, happier, because its people had looked long on Beauty and Nobility, and drunk deep of that strange draught of Peace? Or would it scorn the mesa, or at best receive it with indifference as a dull and wearisome show that lacked excitement and hilarity? In the night, across the valley, the huge, towering mass of sandstone rose, mysterious and sublime, in the light of the silver moon. The soft wind rose and fell in even cadence through the hush of the night. Only the cry of a coyote or the sharp yelp of a fox broke the whisper of a world where walked the invisible gods, rulers of an earth which man was too puny and too ignoble to ever entirely master.

Mrs. Eastcott, waking at last from an uneasy sleep, leaned toward her husband, nodding in the direction of the Indian guests. "John," she said, "I know why they are waiting. They want to see us go off in the automobile. They don't understand how it can move without horses."

“ Or a squaw to push! ” suggested Winthrop.

Eastcott glanced speculatively at the stolid figures by the fire. “ That means they’ll stop till to-morrow after breakfast. But upon my word, I believe you’ve got the key to the situation, my dear! We’ll have to take turns in the next eight or nine hours’ watching.” And he groaned.

“ I’ve always heard that Transcontinentalists take bulldogs along,” said Winthrop lightly. “ If we’d been wise, we might have had a ‘ dog watch ’! ”

“ But why watch at all? Shall I tell you how to get rid of them? Give them a ride! ” Mrs. Eastcott brought out the words with unmistakable vigor in spite of the lateness of the hour.

Winthrop jumped up enthusiastically. “ Capital! ” he cried. “ Scare ’em to death! ”

“ That’ll be the final result, of course,” said Eastcott, laughing. “ What do you propose, my dear? Shall we just invite them politely to take a seat in the tonneau? Do you think they will go in like their own lambs? ”

“ I know they will. Give them a good ride and we’re rid of them forever.”

“ Wake the echoes by racing the engines! Make the old machine smoke like a forest fire! Perfume the air with the aromatic scents of gasoline, and in the midst of the performance one of us will work the horn while the other sets the siren in full blast! They’ll think the voice of the Devil is calling across the ages! ”

Winthrop’s enthusiasm was contagious. East-

cott rose to his feet. "All that's nothing compared to what I'll give them when I open the cut-out and set the brakes rasping. Bravo, Nell! We'll make the night a regular Fourth of July! Gatling guns—Hades let loose—Destruction of San Francisco!—final cataclysm of the Enchanted Mesa—won't be in it!"

"Greatest show on Earth! Let's get to work!" And Winthrop pressed the bulb of the automobile and let forth a shrill trumpeting upon the quiet night.

The Indians started and looked at the car in astonishment. Was the black *carreta* alive that it could shriek thus in the darkness? But when Eastcott suggested, by gestures and polite monosyllables, that the honored visitors might like a little ride with him, they arose with dignity. It must have taken some courage for them to step into the strange vehicle which emitted clouds of smoke and a most nauseous odor. But the Navajos, whatever their secret feelings regarding the adventure, seated themselves in the tonneau with stolid outward serenity. Eastcott "cranked up" with much ostentation till the car palpitated and throbbed with a continuous roar as if anxious to dash away into the darkness. Then he leaped in beside Winthrop. Piff! Paff! Bing! Bang! They were off!

The lamps blazed a broad pathway over the sandy plains. The car rushed swiftly along its course. There were no "speed laws" in the precincts of Acoma, and Eastcott did not hesitate to

show the Indians that an automobile could run faster than any horse they had ever known. Winthrop, who wore a pair of goggles to heighten the general effect of the entertainment, turned to reassure his dusky guests between the siren's wails.

"They're clutching—everything they can get hold of—with prehensile hands and toes," he reported to Eastcott.

And indeed the Indians, half rising in their seats, were clinging to the sides of the car in ill-concealed dismay. Their hair streamed on the wind. They muttered terrified prayers. Never had they taken part in a Devil Dance so weird, so terrible. They had not a doubt that they had at last fallen into the grip of the dread spirits which their Medicine Men for centuries had endeavored to propitiate.

The car swept back to the camp in a wide curve. Suddenly, as it approached, Mrs. Eastcott, who was watching with the chauffeur, snatched a half-burnt cedar branch that had rolled away from the fire, and whirled it above her head. The swift motion set the tongue of flame leaping into the gloom. Round and round her head she swung the blazing torch, while the chauffeur lifted his voice on high in a series of blood-curdling yells that would have done credit to the Navajos themselves. The effect of the performance on the visitors, as the car pulled up with a prolonged blast of the horn, was electrical. With a yell which vied with the voice of the chauffeur, they leaped over the side of the tonneau and disappeared into

the night. Hosts and hostess sank back exhausted with laughter.

“ You’ve been leading lady in a drama you wouldn’t be hired to go to see on a vaudeville stage, my dear! ” gasped Eastcott. “ And you’re a star! I could get you a contract to-morrow.”

But Mrs. Eastcott, instead of bowing to the compliment, looked at her husband in sudden dismay. “ Oh,” she cried. “ My beautiful bag! I can’t find it. I think I left it in the automobile. I forgot it! Look for it! Quick! Everybody! ”

But a prolonged search of the car and the camp by four able-bodied persons, assisted by the light of two immense lamps, failed to discover any trace of the missing treasure. The Navajos had not been too frightened to prove true to the instincts of their race.

CHAPTER XIX

THE adobe in its simplest form is little more than a clay box, roofed with logs or thatch, and as cool in the summer heat as it is warm in the days of chill and dampness. But this very simplicity admits of a thousand amplifications and embellishments, and the adobe, given an outer preservative casing, transformed and enlarged to the ranch house of the Southwest, leaves little to be desired or imagined in the way of comfort.

In the *hacienda* the spirit of Spain and of the original adobe builders is reproduced. Long, low lines, arches, and porticoes—all these suggest solidity and durability, reverence for tradition, summer shade, and winter warmth. Combined with the plain severity of the ancient adobe, there has been achieved a simple dignity well suited to a region where life moves with a slow and gracious ease. The garish, brick buildings of the cities, with their defiance of the past, their want of adaptability to the heat and the strong light of these semi-tropical latitudes are an outrage introduced by uncompromising commercialism. Ignoring the existence of an architecture indigenous to the soil and the people, the American successor of the Mexican has also introduced the

unlovely frame building of the East. Yet hundreds of years ago the Spaniards produced a noble architecture, expressive of the spirit of Rome and of Greece and forming an unbroken link with the Renaissance of Medieval Europe, while giving promise of one day becoming the distinctive glory of the New World.

The Deering home was a typical Mexican residence in the heart of the wilderness—a *hacienda* of recent construction, designed to reproduce the air of ancient hospitality and lordliness which had characterized the huge ranches in the days of Mexican rule. It was a long, one-storied building occupying three sides of a square garden, but stretching out numerous wings that suggested an almost indefinite amount of space for the accommodation of possible guests. Vines crept over the gray and cream-tinted walls. Shrubs and late blooming flowers edged the wide, low veranda that looked across the garden and the irrigating ditches to the plains and the distant mountains.

In a patch of sunshine, a big St. Bernard dog lay stretched at full length in that indolent form of wakefulness which keeps one eye cocked at an angle acute enough to take in all immediate surroundings while the other calmly indulges in reposeful slumber. Close by, so silent and motionless as to have been overlooked by the casual observer, a small Indian boy in native dress squatted against one of the rudely carved pillars that gave an air of rough, artistic elegance to the veranda. Together the dog and the boy, who was recruited

from a neighboring pueblo, constituted Evelyn's bodyguards. The sound of approaching hoofs caused the canine sleeper to reverse the order of the watchful and somnolent optics. Three horses, led by a ranch hand, appeared around a corner of the house. When they reached the Indian, the man tossed the bridles to the crouching figure.

One of the horses was a spirited, lithe-limbed bay, who pawed the driveway and tossed his Mexican trappings with impatience; another was a small Indian pony such as the Pueblo boy might ride; the third was a little, white mare, which whinnied to the St. Bernard. She carried a lady's saddle of such unusual appearance—of such an elaborate interweaving of beads—that no one would have had any difficulty in guessing it to be of Indian workmanship. From its beauty, it might once have been the property of a dark-skinned Princess or of the favorite squaw of a great Chief. It was made entirely of small, white beads that glistened in the sunshine like tiny diamonds. Pommel and crupper, which rose high from the mare's back, were decorated by an intricate pattern of yellow and green, as were the long white hangings that fell on either side behind the big Indian stirrups. The whole effect was more that of an imposingly beautiful, primitive throne than of a saddle for twentieth century use.

The St. Bernard rose with leisurely dignity, and, stepping down from the low veranda, rubbed his nose against that of the mare. As he did so, there was a flutter of a khaki riding habit and a clink

of spurs from the doorway that led into the cream-tinted house, and Evelyn and Santos came out to the veranda.

The girl ran impulsively to the mare, and caught the white, green-beaded reins from the Indian boy. She would have leaped as lightly into the saddle, unaided, had not her companion held out a slender, olive hand.

"It is too bad, Señor," she said from her throne, "to take you off for a ride when you have been out on the ranch all the morning. Don't come! Stay here with Ambrose for a rest in the shade. Pee-nah-wee will take care of me!"

The Indian boy, who was standing by her side, grinned in proud devotion and snapped a fly from the little mare's neck.

"I must go if the Señorita goes," said Santos, with a half frown. "See! The bay is not weary! And I—I shall become rested in the Señorita's society!"

She smiled at the compliment, and nodded to the boy, who flung himself, at the signal, astride the Indian pony. But Santos still lingered with a deepening frown.

"The cowboy who brought the news that the Americanos were in sight across the plains may have seen falsely. Why does the Señorita trouble herself to go to meet them?"

In the words, coupled with the frown, there was an unmistakable slight upon the visitors which Evelyn was quick to resent. She drew herself up proudly with sudden reserve. "They are my

friends, Señor!" she said coldly. "I think you had best stay behind to recover your lost graciousness."

The rebuke stung—how much Evelyn did not guess. But the "Flower of the Santos" bowed to a reproof he would have taken from no one else, and vaulted into his saddle without reply. The mare whinnied again, and the St. Bernard gave a deep, answering bay before he lay down on the deserted veranda.

Señor Santos rode beside his hostess for some time in silence. He was unpleasantly conscious that he was going forth to welcome his rival with every show of friendliness. Yet if Evelyn persisted in meeting the Americano, she should not go alone; the intruder should see that a Santos had prior claim to her society. What a picture she made, he thought, on the Indian saddle! Her hair blew lightly about her face under her soft felt hat, kissing the pink cheeks that her companion longed to press with his own ardent lips; she sat as proudly in the high saddle as any woman of his own ancestry. She would make a wife who offended none of the Santos' traditions—a wife well fitted for the last scion of a noble and once powerful family. The last——? With such a woman for his wife, might not the name of Santos yet ring gloriously through ages to come?

It was no exaggeration to declare that the days without Evelyn had dragged interminably, but the *Mexican* had interpreted her acceptance of the

Eastcotts' invitation for the automobile journey much as he would have interpreted the sudden shying of her little, white mare had he reached out a hand for the beaded bridle. He did not like Evelyn the less, for he did not doubt that ultimately she would come at his call. But he had been seriously annoyed that political affairs had prevented his joining her in Santa Fé and had thus given his rival several more days of her uninterrupted society. It was not that he feared the *Americano*, but he fiercely resented the other's attentions, and he smiled darkly as he thought that if any extreme measures were adopted to secure the *Señorita* for New Mexico, it would be the "pest of an Easterner" who was to blame.

Up to the present, Santos had played the time-honored part of the gallant of flowery compliments and graceful courtesies with no little satisfaction to himself and with every outward assurance that his *inamorata* had been duly impressed. He could not, however, disguise from himself the fact that his love affair, thanks to the intruder, progressed less rapidly than his eager spirit would desire. If Evelyn had been a Mexican girl she would have responded to the wooing of a Santos as flame to the rubbing of a match. But if he had expected her to fall at his feet, he had to confess that he was thus far half-baffled by the cool self-possession of the American girl. Evelyn, he knew, was all ardor, all passion, were she rightly aroused; she possessed a nature much of which was in revolt against the spiritless Ameri-

canism which is the negation of emotion. At the same time, Santos recognized a depth to be touched by something more than words. In the artistry of wooing, as in the artistry of the stage, the great essential is to impress and hold one's audience. It was this more serious side of Evelyn's character to which he must now make appeal. He must meet the girl with an overmastering power that should bear her along on the bosom of its strong, irresistible flood; he must impress his "audience" once and forever. The *Junta*, indeed the world at large, should see what he would do when he had won her for himself and the Cause.

"A thousand suns, Señorita, have risen and set since last we rode together." Santos' voice was soft and insinuating. He could not afford to resent her rebuke of a few moments before.

"You might have lessened the thousand years by several days had you joined us at Santa Fé," said Evelyn reproachfully.

"You expected me there, Señorita? Say the words that shall gladden me for eternity—you expected me?"

"Perhaps so. You had said that you would come, had you not?"

"And you were sorry? But no, that would be too much. I busied myself with affairs—affairs great as the tall mountains and far-spreading as the New Mexican plains."

Señor Santos bent forward over his horse's neck *in order to get a better look at Evelyn's face.*

But she nodded to a shabby peon in Navajo blanket who saluted them as he passed. The girl's expression betrayed no curiosity concerning the "great affairs" to which the Mexican had alluded. He flipped his leggings with his riding whip impatiently.

"You like it that a man should love his country as a woman her child, is it not so?"

She answered with her eyes still on the horizon. "Assuredly."

"And when his country is New Mexico, where the mists on the mountains speak beauty, and where shadows hide in the canyons and the sun paints the rocks and the plains with the brush of a Murillo—you like it that he should be true?"

This time her smile deepened into a laugh, and she glanced at her companion. "He cannot love beauty too well to please me!" she said.

Santos showed his white teeth in satisfaction. "I knew it. Always I have said, 'The Señorita is a woman patriot.' She understands the great fire that burns in a man's heart for the land of his fathers. If she but loved, a spark from that fire might set her heart, too, alight."

They had reached the confines of the Deering ranch, and as if echoing Santos' words there came a distant halloo from the left of their path. Two men, mounted on horseback, could be distinctly seen across the levels. One waved a hat and shouted again, as Evelyn swung her riding whip around her head and answered with a sweet, high

feminine cry that could not have covered half the distance.

“It is Father,” she said, “on his way back to the ranch house.”

Santos shaded his eyes with his hand, and gazed after the moving figures. Was it that his thoughts of the *Junta* had projected upon the screen of his vision some freak of mental mirage, or was there a sinister familiarity in the form of the man who rode with Colonel Deering?

For the moment he was so startled by the apparition as to rein in his horse in astonished dismay—the next, he would have set spurs to the animal and have dashed furiously after the man. But as he drove his heels into the bay, the khaki riding habit fluttered against his feet, and by one of those quick changes of impulse of which the Spanish mind is capable, he dashed past the white mare and pulled up shortly a hundred yards ahead in a manner as melodramatic as it was brilliant.

As she approached, Evelyn greeted his exploit with enthusiastic bravos, little guessing the cause of the Quixotic dash. Then, before he could speak, she had galloped off in her turn, with the Pueblo lad in hot pursuit, along the trail which ran east to join the railroad. Santos took a last glance at Colonel Deering's companion, and dashed after the flying pair. In the exhilaration of the gallop, he convinced himself that he had been the momentary victim of a strange phantasmagoria of the senses. Yet it was a disagreeable omen that had *forced itself* upon his superstitious nature.



"They had reached the confines of the Deering ranch."

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“The Señor who rode with the Colonel, your father,” he asked as casually as possible when Evelyn at last brought the little mare to a walk, “he is a stranger?”

“I suppose so!” said Evelyn indifferently, catching her breath after the wild dash. “Father told me someone was coming down from Santa Fé on business and would stop for the night. Cattlemen are always coming, you know; I don’t bother about them.”

“Ah! A *ranchero*!” said Santos, only half satisfied with the answer.

The exhilaration of the gallop had flushed Evelyn’s cheeks to crimson and set her blood tingling. Since her return from Chicago the spell of the Southwest had dominated her more potently than ever before. It was so beautiful, so beautiful—her New Mexico! So free, so joyous, so bathed in sunshine and wild, riotous color! Santos was right to worship the land of his fathers and to spend himself in efforts for its reform. It was here—here in the warmth and azure mists, in the opal dawns and the velvet, diamond-studded nights, here with the rainbow rocks and the mystery of the past, that she must forever remain. She had read once that the desert “got people.” New Mexico had “got” her—enslaved her for all time. And the man beside her was the human embodiment of all the romance and beauty which lingered under the sunny skies of his country.

She leaned toward him impulsively from the high-pommeled saddle. “Oh!” she cried exult-

antly, "Oh, Señor, is it not glorious to be on the ranch again? What is an automobile compared to four swift feet and a sleek, white body to carry one over the plains? Are you not glad—glad—glad to be at home again?"

"The Señorita has said it," he answered, watching her intently. "It is heaven—my country!"

"At least it is nearer heaven than Chicago—several thousand feet!" laughed the girl.

"We agree," he said gayly. "We always agree, Señorita, when our hearts speak their truth. Have you noticed? But the affair that has occupied me—Señorita, on that, also, we should agree." His hand swept round in a wide parabola as he indicated the distant mountains and the broad, grass-covered *vegas* which spread out to meet them. "My great affair is patriotism. I would rescue this that the Señorita finds beautiful from"—he paused—"the unbeautiful." He finished the sentence with a shrug. "You believe with me, Señorita, it is a work for a man?"

"Indeed I do," she said. "I suppose that is the most primitive form of patriotism, and the most highly civilized. The Indians fought to keep out what they thought unlovely. And now in the twentieth century, Señor Santos will make the beauty of his Southwest more beautiful by reforms among his people!" She bowed gracefully over her mare's neck in tribute to his work. In spite of her smile, he could not doubt her seriousness. *He knew that he had interested her.*

Some distance ahead the trail entered a deep depression between the rocks. Santos pointed toward it with his riding whip, at the same time nodding to a small group of lonely pines that, close at hand, made a rare spot of shade on the sun-kissed *vegas*.

“ See, my Señorita! It is best that we go no further. Let us rest! ”

She did not refuse. From the shade of the pines she could watch the distant hollow from which the automobile must emerge, and doubtless her escort was really weary, since he had spent that day many hours in the saddle.

He lifted her down from her Indian “ throne ” with a devotion that was almost a caress. Seating her upon the ground beneath the lofty branches that were silhouetted, cool and green, against the intense blue of the sky, he flung himself down beside her, and, his handsome, glowing face bending dangerously near hers, broke into a rapid, eager outline of his ambitions.

He would rouse the Mexicans to the greatness and nobility of their fathers; they should stand again before the world, children of the glorious Conquistadores who drew their power from the heart of the golden sun. No more should they dwell in hovels in mind and body; there should be schools, organizations through the length and breadth of New Mexico that should teach them to grow. The Señorita would understand. Had not she labored for the down-trodden in the great city? Had she not been pale when he had first

met her—pale from the struggle against misery and unhappiness she could not relieve? Ah, she knew the longing that made a man strong to help his people! Already he belonged to a great club—it was thus the *Americanos* called such assemblies, was it not so?—which was to redeem New Mexico. At once the schools were to be started.

Señor Santos mingled the high-sounding phrases and lofty ideals of his speech at the *Junta* with the more concrete and immediate reforms which his fertile brain had planned to prepare his people for the future. But he spoke in generalities. To have entered upon the actual and carefully guarded details of the Pan-Mexican movement or to have explained that the *Junta* was actually a political society would have meant the premature betrayal of a great national secret when his heart and tongue were pledged to a silence, to break which, by all the rules of the organization, meant death. He dared not hint, had he wished, that the schools were to teach military tactics rather than reading and writing, that the Mexicans were to escape their “hovels” by arms instead of by culture. Evelyn was not yet prepared for such a revelation. Time enough when he had won her to make her understand the real purpose of his work.

Evelyn listened in the bright, still, autumn afternoon of the *vegas*—listened and looked at the animated, dark face, and flushed and glowed with an answering enthusiasm. She might have *known* that Señor Santos was a great man, she

said to herself. All that Spanish fire and fervor were so much capital directed to splendid achievements which were bound to accomplish wonderful results. It was noble work of which he spoke—work beside which her life in the settlement looked like a mere child's play. She had labored for a class, he for a people. She remembered the day that the Chicago doctor had told her she must go home, that she was not strong enough for the work she had undertaken—temperamentally too “fine,” he had said, and she had laughed, scornfully, as she wept. It was months since then, and the Southwest had come between her and the city. She would not go back if she could. But already the old wish to serve her kind was reawakening with the New Mexican's eager words. He had been right; she understood his desire to uplift the downtrodden of his race.

Santos paused at last, and searched her eyes with his to discover how deep had been the effect upon the “audience” he would impress and hold.

She met his glance frankly, with an eager gravity that might have been the height of coquetry on the part of a woman less sincerely interested in the subject under discussion.

“The Spaniards *must* be great again,” she said. “I believe, Señor, that I shall see your dreams and your hopes come true!”

He looked at her with gratitude flashing in his eyes. “Señorita! Señorita!” he murmured, and took her hand in his. She let it lie passively in the slender, cigarette-stained fingers as he con-

tinued. "It is your help that the work needs, *Carissima!* Did I not say it—that you were a woman patriot? *Carissima*, a Santos offers you a great work. A Santos lays his heart and his people at your feet."

His voice was low and passionate. He held her hand in a tight clasp, and bent toward her with a longing that only the presence of the Pueblo boy, who crouched by the horses a short distance away, restrained.

Evelyn was silent. She had known, of course, that Señor Santos would speak to her again of love at the first opportunity. Ever since she returned to the ranch she had been trying to bring herself to the point of confessing to her father the scene in Kansas City. But she could not talk with Colonel Deering unless she could tell him what answer she meant to give the Mexican. And she did not know! Over and over she had involuntarily compared Santos and Winthrop, sometimes to the advantage of one, sometimes to that of the other. More than once she had chided herself for such invidious comparisons, assuring herself that she loved neither enough for marriage, and promising to end the love-making of both at the first opportunity. She had understood that by riding with Santos that afternoon she gave him an opening that he would be likely to employ. But she was tired of self-analysis and questioning. When she came out she had had an idea she would tell him that he must wait. Whom did *she* love? She had thought that she did not know.

Yet that sudden wild rush of ecstatic delight in the beauty and freedom of New Mexico, and Santos' unexpected revelation of his dreams and aspirations for his countrymen, had had their effect. She was conscious again of that same compelling influence which he had exerted over her during the dance a fortnight before. Then she had resisted it—now she yielded to it, gradually but none the less surely.

As if aware of some inner response to his appeal, Santos continued without waiting for her reply. He was clever enough, however, to understand that the reference to his work had strengthened his case.

“ When I spoke to you before, my Señorita, you were frightened. But now it is different. Listen! You hear the voice of the hills and the *vegas*, speaking with me. It is to the great work—the Reform—they call. And I—*Carissima*, my *Carissima*, I love you! ”

She would have answered him. But instead of his brilliant eyes and the red lips that trembled nearer and nearer hers, she saw a shadowy form in the darkness of a little canyon, and wide, protecting arms of refuge and shelter. She shook her head to dispel the vision, and she heard a quiet voice, as different from this hot pleading as peace from excitement, which said, “ All my life is bound up with the hope that you will be my wife? ” What was Love? She looked out across the meadows to the hills to which Santos had pointed. He was right. They did speak to

her. But what did they say? Were not they, too, calling her to Love? But was it the Love that was Fire, or the Love that was Calm?

Santos pressed her hands as he had done in Kansas City. He was answering the question for her.

“You, too, my Señorita—you, too, feel the great consuming fire? I see it in your cheeks. They flush. Your eyes—they grow bright. Your hands are hot—the hands that will mold to greater beauty the work for which I give myself.”

Her eyes met his. Again that ecstasy of the Southwest swept over her. She flushed more deeply like a crimson rose, and, before his passionate gaze that drank of her eyes like wine, her own fell. Something—was it a spark of that fire to which he had alluded?—flashed between them.

She leaned toward him for the first time. Her lips trembled, though she smiled. Her voice was hushed, almost solemn.

“I am glad you told me about it—your work. I love it. I do want to do something for America—for your people.”

For an instant Santos wondered if this beautiful girl of the hated, dominant race were mocking him. But, no! She regarded him steadily with unmistakable sincerity. She had drawn slightly closer to him. Except for the presence of the Indian boy, he would have clasped her in his arms. Instead he kissed her hands impulsively.

“My beloved—my Carmen,” he murmured. “You will help me in the great work?”

His face was close to hers. His presence was compelling, intoxicating. The work—the work—Emilio Santos——

“Yes,” she whispered dreamily, and made no effort to draw away.

He kissed her hands again as if to seal the compact.

A long-drawn cry of a siren sounded from the hollow between the rocks, like a shriek of despair across the plains. Santos laughed triumphantly.

CHAPTER XX

EVELYN sprang to her feet. The siren sound in her startled ears like a reproach. What had she done? What had she said to Santos?

Across the plain the Transcontinental automobile was swiftly moving in her direction, preceded by the pilot car. She raised her whip and waved it in welcome, at the same time calling to the Indian for the horses. Almost before she realized it, she was racing on the white mare to meet the newcomers. There was the flutter of a handkerchief, and a "Wa-a-hoo!" like an Indian's whoop from Winthrop. In another moment she was beside the Eastcott car.

It seemed to Evelyn, trembling with nervous excitement, that Winthrop's eager greeting consciously echoed the reproach of the siren. He held her hand a little longer than was necessary, and his smile was a new and eloquent avowal of his love. Nevertheless, she was uncomfortably aware that he noticed her distraught manner.

The white mare kept pace with the Eastcott automobile, as cars and riders moved forward across the ranch. Evelyn had tried to send Santos to the other side of the machine, but, though she had bent over Mrs. Eastcott's hand most politely in greeting, and now smiled broadly on the end

company, he refused to observe the hints of his hostess, and clung tenaciously to his position at her side. The Indian boy brought up the rear of a procession still headed by the pilot car. Evelyn looked at Santos, handsome, olive-skinned, erect, the wide "Stetson" and buckskin leggings giving him a touch of romantic unconventionality; and then she looked at Winthrop, who sat with his face turned toward her and his arm over the back of the seat. It was with difficulty that she could focus her attention on the ranch and the details of a life which was absorbingly interesting to her visitors.

To the travelers the Deering ranch was an agreeable change from the wild landscape and the rough trails of the past few days. From the time they had found the correct path westward—having returned from Acoma to the pumping station—the journey had been a continual struggle through sand and narrow passes, and over the hard, unrelenting surfaces of the lava deposits of the Indian country of Romances. The bare, forbidding lava beds had laid a blight upon the scenery, striking an almost overpowering sense of awe into the hearts of the weary travelers. A third night's camping had been necessary before Eastcott sighted, from afar, the pilot car with the much-desired supply of gasoline. Now, the wide, cedar-dotted "meadows" of the ranch, where in season grew the rich grama grass—range food of the finest quality—the grazing cattle, the fertile, red-brown soil, the refreshing streams,

and, beyond, the fringe of distant, purple mountains, formed a welcome sequel to the black cliffs of the lava beds.

“ Why, this is beautiful, my dear—beautiful! ” cried Mrs. Eastcott from the tonneau, after a rapid recital of her adventures and of the melodramatic disappearance of McNulty at Santa Fé. “ And I had been thinking that you had banished yourself to a spot forgotten of God and man! ”

“ Not man! There are cowboys and ranch hands too many to be counted. But it really is quite the loveliest ranch in this part of New Mexico. ” Evelyn spoke in a nervous, strained tone, for she was acutely conscious of Santos’ proximity. “ Father bought it from a romantic Scotch lord whose hobby was American property. But the laird grew tired of it, or his Scotch castles needed him—anyway, he gave us our chance! ”

“ The laird was a ‘ canny Scot,’ all the same, ” said Eastcott admiringly.

Santos leaned forward and addressed the automobilists. “ It is the ranch lands that lie near the *hacienda* that the strangers will love best, ” he said, with an air of ostentatious pride.

“ Do you remember that the monks saw the angels measuring boundaries with line and rod for the founding of one of the Mexican cities? ” asked Evelyn, ignoring Santos and addressing the party at large. “ Privately, I believe that angels helped the Scotch laird design the ranch. ”

“ And yet this was once Apache land, I sup-

pose!" said Mrs. Eastcott with a sigh. "There must really have been some poetic instinct even in those incorrigible savages when they could choose such a setting for their camps and their awful, murderous raids."

Winthrop laughed. "That is the first nice thing you have ever said about the Apaches, Aunt Nell. I believe we'll have you excusing those very raids yet on the ground of their picturesqueness."

"Perhaps you may," answered his aunt resignedly. "I confess I'd excuse a good deal if I could have a high-pommeled saddle of beads, and a white mare, and a color in my cheeks like Evelyn's."

This time everybody laughed, and Evelyn bowed with a deeper rose in her face. Santos touched his hat as if he, too, acknowledged the compliment. His manner was that of a man who thanks a friend for being kind to his wife.

Winthrop noticed the incident and lifted his brows. In spite of Mrs. Eastcott's approval of Evelyn's appearance, to his prejudiced eyes the girl had lost the buoyancy and good spirits that had characterized her when she left Santa Fé. Even in that first moment, when he had leaped down from the automobile to take her hand in his, she had seemed to him to answer his greetings with a kind of detached and perfunctory politeness. He missed already the innocent coquetry of the days of their comradeship. From his seat beside the new chauffeur he studied Evelyn surreptitiously. She looked troubled, and she

sat the oddly beautiful white and green saddle with an erectness that betokened a tense nervousness rather than easy grace.

“It is not, as you would say, a ranch in exactness,” explained Santos gayly, showing his white teeth in a flashing smile. “It is rather a home of charity. The Colonel raises many cattle. It is the Señorita who has made it the refuge for the unhappy.”

He waved his riding whip toward a gaunt, haggard, *duodecimo* edition of an approaching donkey, driven by a sturdy Mexican who might easily have carried the forlorn creature on one strong arm. It seemed scarcely able to walk, and certainly would have furnished a scanty meal for a couple of carrion crows. As it passed the automobile, the wretched animal lifted up its voice in a weird shriek that might have been an attempt to express all the sins and wrongs of mankind toward its suffering race.

“Good heavens!” cried Eastcott as the broken and raucous music of the hideous bray died away in an asthmatic wheeze. “The silence is like the passing from Hades into Heaven!”

Evelyn, who had nodded to the Mexican ranch hand as he passed, smiled a little sadly. “The burros’ lot in the Southwest is more ‘kicks than halfpence,’ as the English say. That’s the horror of it—the goading and scourging of the poor, half-starved slaves who have helped to make the country, until they look like mere mummies of animals!”

“It is a home for the ill-used donkeys—this great ranch,” explained Santos glibly. “The Señorita’s kind heart would stock it with every burro and mule that is unhappy in New Mexico.”

The little procession had left the path over which the riders had traveled two hours before, and had turned to the left among the foothills. Evelyn felt strangely irritated by Santos’ show of intimacy with the minutiae of her home life; it savored too much—as she suspected he intended—of proprietorship in his hostess and of a joint pride in her household gods. She began to talk rapidly with a forced gayety which caused Winthrop to look at her in half-pained surprise. Suddenly, a cleft in the rocks revealed an amphitheater that opened into distant valleys of varying elevations and led between ragged banks of red earth to a low, broad spreading mesa. And here, set upon the higher ground, like the holy places of men’s devotions from time immemorial, stood a miniature pueblo village.

“See!” cried Santos. “The untamed children of the ranch!”

“It is my pueblo,” explained Evelyn with pretty triumph. “I meant it to surprise you. Father bought it with the ranch and gave it to me. My Indian boy lives there.”

The automobiles slowly made their way toward the gray and melancholy adobe houses, passing an old Indian woman of leathery skin, who stared at them with unwinking eyes. Then, espied by the children, they were rapidly surrounded by

a respectful but clamoring crowd, more or less aware of the identity of the girl on the white mare.

“Are they not charming—the people of my Zanuni?” she asked.

“Already the Señorita speaks a few words of their language,” volunteered Santos.

Winthrop looked at the little village thoughtfully. Then his eyes traveled to the Indian boy who was Evelyn’s servant, a silent, somber, uncivilized figure who reproduced the wild desolation of the crumbling adobe houses. So these were the things that Evelyn loved and which were a part of her life—the wide grazing grounds with their tall, yellowing grasses, the distant mountains, the sick burros, the little pueblo, the Indian boy! They added to the romantic character of her personality, but, for a moment, they gave Winthrop an uncomfortable feeling of aloofness, as if Evelyn were again removed, by her surroundings, from the world where he dwelt in thought and action.

“They worship not only Montezuma, but the Sun and the Sun’s wife, the Lady Moon,” she was saying. “And they believe that eclipses are family quarrels, and the Stars are the children of the Sun and the Moon.”

“Well, my dear,” said Mrs. Eastcott, “I’d rather have your saddle than your pueblo. I should think you’d feel like a heathen yourself with such a primitive family.”

“I do—I am,” laughed Evelyn as the procession started again. “They are the happiest peo-

ple I know. You would love their floral ceremonies, Mrs. Eastcott."

"Which raises the question as to whether dullness that is satisfied with the conditions of four or five centuries back is really happiness or not." Winthrop looked at the girl half quizzically, half speculatively. "Why don't you write a psychological novel, Evelyn, and call it 'Zanuni'?" he asked.

It was the first time that afternoon that Winthrop had publicly used the girl's name. Santos started. "Evelyn?" What business had the blond Americano to presume to speak thus to the Señorita? Such familiarity was insufferable. Santos looked to see Evelyn draw herself up, proudly resentful. To his surprise she seemed not to observe the affront. Very well; then it remained for a Santos to teach the man his place.

"And every Cook's tourist will invade your Paradise with a Baedeker," commented Mrs. Eastcott cheerfully. "Someone will lease the pueblo from your father, and retire on a fortune from the gate-money."

"You might call it the City of the Fountain of Youth—or Age," suggested Winthrop; "something the Spaniards missed, you know, much to their chagrin."

"Oh, but the Spaniards were here," said Evelyn, her nervousness partly dispelled by her interest in the subject. You can see the footprints of the first white man who entered the valley cen-

turies ago. What would you say if I told you that Zanuni is the only village on earth that endured the flood? There is a story that long ago the rain fell all over the Southwest, till all the adobe houses melted away, and the whole country was slipping off into the water. Then all the tribes that had managed to crawl to the high places prayed to the Sun. And when the Sun didn't hear and the waters continued to rise, they prayed to the Moon. But the Moon did not hear, and they prayed to the Stars. When the Stars also were deaf, the Indians took the Cacique's daughter and son and decked them with the flowers that were left, and tossed them over into the water—as a kind of libation, I suppose. Then the waters receded, and here was Zanuni, high and dry. But the poor sacrifices became stone columns in the wilderness—you'll see the maiden's blushes in the sandstone."

Everyone laughed. "This antedates Acoma, of course?" ventured Winthrop.

"Oh, of course," cried the girl lightly. "I believe I have heard it said that the legend belongs to some other village, but it is so charming that I've adopted it for Zanuni, just as some people adopt attractive ancestors, you know. I'm always on the lookout for good things for Zanuni. You may be sure, Winthrop, that it shall have the best that offers. If anybody has a particularly charming legend, or a poetic fancy, I'll bargain for it at once." She looked at her friends with a smiling challenge.

This time Santos did more than stare and frown. He gave the bay such a vicious cut with his short riding whip that the animal suddenly reared and pawed the air. "Winthrop!" "Evelyn!" The dog of an *Americano* should be made to understand that familiarities were not permitted. A week ago he had been spying at the *Junta* in the Apache Canyon! Now he was further encroaching on a Spaniard's preserves! He must have used his time well on the Santa Fé Trail to have arrived at such intimacy. He should be warned at once that the girl had already promised herself to a Santos!

In the brilliance of the afternoon, the hills stood out, clear-cut against the vivid sky. Far away one snowy peak floated in the heavens in a gossamer mist of palest blue. And at last, across the court-like garden, the low, vine-covered ranch house stretched its wings, like arms, to welcome the travelers.

In the doorway Colonel Deering translated its mute hospitality into cordial words. "Hurrah!" he cried, hurrying down to the touring car. "Well met, at last! What kind of a journey have you had, Eastcott? Mrs. Eastcott, I present you with the freedom of the ranch. Glad to see you, Hammond! Welcome, welcome, everybody!"

There was a confusion of greetings, and the excitement of unloading the automobile; then the dusty cars rolled away, and peace settled down on the *hacienda*. For the ladies, somewhere behind the floating, muslin draperies that, at the

windows, half shut out the view of the garden, there was a long conversation, punctuated by light laughter and many exclamations—a conversation such as women who are fond of each other enjoy after a separation. Outside, on the veranda, the men lounged and smoked with their host.

Santos, slightly withdrawn from the group, leaned back angrily in a wicker easy chair, smoking a cigarette and taking no part in the conversation. Winthrop cast a surreptitious glance in his rival's direction now and then, and, noticing the frowning brows, instinctively understood that he himself was the cause of the man's evident ill-temper. While he listened to the animated conversation between his uncle and Colonel Deering, his mind was busy with questions. How long had Santos been at the ranch? How had the Mexican explained to Evelyn his absence from Santa Fé? Was this apparent resentment, now, due to the fact that Santos had recognized the inquirer at the door of the Mexican house in the Apache Canyon, or to the interruption of a possible tête-à-tête with his fair hostess while waiting on the *vegas* for the Transcontinental car?

Colonel Deering at last became conscious that the conversation among his guests was dragging. He glanced at Santos and then at Winthrop. He, too, thought of the ride which his daughter and the Mexican had taken together that afternoon. Judging from Santos' frown, the wooing was not altogether a success. He wished Mrs. Eastcott *could* see the Mexican's face at that moment, and

he congratulated himself that matters were progressing so satisfactorily. He threw down his cigar stub.

“ Well, Eastcott—Hammond, my boy—what would you think of a little turn round the ranch? ” he said jovially. “ I’ve got some good horseflesh I’d like to show you. I won’t ask you, Santos—the place is an old story to you; and—and ”—Colonel Deering could not help a sly thrust at his would-be son-in-law—“ you look—er—as if you’d had some bad news, eh? ”

Santos drew himself up suddenly and flipped the ashes off his cigarette. His expression changed. As if he had read Colonel Deering’s thoughts, a look of triumph succeeded the frown on his face.

“ Bad news! ” He laughed and took a rapid puff at his cigarette. “ Bah! On the contrary, I have very good news! ” For a moment his eyes met Winthrop’s.

The sun was long past its setting when the party assembled in the wide apartment that ran through the ranch house from front to rear.

“ You are wondering if it is a hall or a living-room,” said Evelyn, as Mrs. Eastcott looked about her admiringly, at the collection of riding whips on the wall, at the open fire, the easy chairs, and the table of books and magazines that stood at one end of the buffalo-skin hearth rug. “ Well, it is really both; every room in the house is a living-room.”

“ Good! ” exclaimed Eastcott. “ But I’ll wager

that little place that I saw an hour ago, opening off the garden and full of pipes and tobacco smoke is your father's living-room."

"And this is Evelyn's—or one of them, on a cool evening," said the Colonel. "Do you see that easy chair there by the table? Drop in any autumn evening for a call, Hammond, and you'll find her curled up there, reading and dreaming dreams in the fire."

"Dreaming? For shame, Daddy! I'm trying to translate the pattern on the great Acoma vase over there. Señor Santos has hinted that it has a vast significance—an epic message—and I'm sure if I study it long enough its meaning will some day percolate into my consciousness."

"Another jewel for Zanuni's crown?" suggested Mrs. Eastcott.

Evelyn nodded. "That pattern may be a thrilling legend—the very thing I need to prove that Montezuma himself once dwelt in Zanuni. Did you know that Pee-nah-wee, my Indian boy, is able to make pottery? He is to teach me some time at the pueblo. And then what legends you will all have on your vases!"

The boy, crouching beside the St. Bernard on the buffalo rug, did not look up at the mention of his name. He was as motionless as the pueblo vase of which Evelyn spoke, and as untranslatable by these men and women of a modern civilization.

Winthrop nodded toward the two figures on the rug.

"I've not forgotten the legend about ' Brother

Ambrose,' '' he said with a good-natured smile. " I'm feeling highly flattered! "

" Oh, you've been introduced? " she answered with a touch of the old coquetry, absent during the afternoon. " And you recognized the likeness? "

" Instantly! The same remarkable development of the frontal bone! The same massive strength of physique and purpose! The same power for silent utterance! " He gave the laughing words a significance she could not fail to comprehend.

Señor Santos, standing in conversation with Eastcott and the Colonel, was aware of every word between his love and his rival.

And at that moment, through the open door at the rear of the hall, came the cattleman, whom Santos had seen across the ranch, and who was to join his host at dinner. Colonel Deering presented him ceremoniously—a tall, slender figure, topped by a dark Mexican face that wore an expression, half-sneering, half-triumphant.

Villara! Santos stared blankly at the familiar face. Villara! Here on the Deering ranch to spy upon the leader of the *Junta* and his relations to the Americanos! With a sudden, swift motion Santos' hand went mechanically to his hip pocket. Then he bowed distantly.

Villara gave him no chance to ignore a former acquaintance. " Ah, Señor Santos! " he said in Spanish. " It is a pleasure. It is a different meeting from our last, is it not so? "

The words, the covert reminder of the dissatis-

faction of the *Junta*, sent the blood to Santos' brain. The man was a fox, a devil, to come spying here!

How he reached the dining-room and took his seat beside Evelyn, how he conducted himself through the early courses of the dinner, Santos did not know. In spite of his anger he presently became aware that the situation called for some alarm as well as wrath. The enemy had trapped the leader under circumstances most compromising to a Spaniard who professed to hate the Americans and to scheme only for their ruin. The chances that either Villara or the *Junta* could be persuaded for a second time to believe that a Santos was using the Americans for loyal political ends were exceedingly small. *Diabolo!* Just when he would have appeared bold in the face of the blond rival—just when the girl had given a promise—he must be cautious and reserved before Villara! Was ever a proud Santos in such a despicable position!

When the fever of the Spanish brain permitted cognizance of the conversation, Colonel Deering was speaking. "And you mean to say that the only clew to the man is that letter you received at the pumping station?"

"I certainly do," replied Eastcott. "And glad enough we were to get that, too! For it had looked, up to the moment we read that letter, as if a faithful servant had turned out to be a scoundrel. Of course, he may be so yet, and this be just *a ruse*. But for the moment we can only assume

the letter to be true and that McNulty is a prisoner in some unscrupulous person's hands. However, there's no address and the signature is absolutely undecipherable."

"We've studied it till we're nearly blind, but not a hint of the name can we get," added Winthrop.

"Have you done anything at all in the matter as yet?" Evelyn was unguardedly surprised and anxious.

"Nothing," said Eastcott. "It's not very many hours since I had the letter, you know. Do you think, Colonel, that his disappearance could possibly be somebody's attempt to get a ransom of any kind?"

Evelyn started. A ransom? That was the supposed reason the men had stolen her from Raton. Was Mr. Eastcott's cautious suggestion a hint that, having failed once, the kidnappers were trying again? Remembering her last glimpse of McNulty talking with one of the thieves, it seemed to her more probable that he was in collusion with them than that he was at their mercy. She turned to Winthrop, and was relieved that he smiled, as if, after all, the whole affair were somewhat of a commonplace.

"A ransom? For McNulty?" repeated Colonel Deering incredulously.

"Even chauffeurs, like good maid-servants in New York, have a high market value. McNulty is of value to us."

"But chauffeurs are easily replaceable."

"Yes, I suppose they are. Then let's try other theory."

"For instance?"

"That we have enemies!"

"But, why, my dear 'Sherlock'?"

"Has Señor the letter?" Villara spoke suddenly in a smooth, oily voice.

"Yes," said Eastcott, taking out a crumpled paper. "I suppose I must send it to—a detective at Santa Fé at once." He glanced at Winthrop.

Villara reached out his hand. "I Mexican look—know much Mexicans—*gracias!*"

The message was brief, and stated in misspelled English that the chauffeur of Mr. Eastcott was at that moment safe and well, but that he had been "detained." No harm would come to him, and the writer could doubtless be of assistance to Eastcott in securing the release of the man. The signature was all but undecipherable.

Señor Villara looked at the writing shrewdly with an expression not unlike the cunning leer on the face of a skulking coyote. But everyone was totally unprepared for the exclamation which followed. Villara cried out in unfeigned surprise.

"Ah, Señor! Villara find '*pronto!*' The '*hombre*' have very much common name. I regard, Señor Eastcott. Villara read it: L-o-m-e-z—Lomez!"

Eastcott looked at the letter hastily and handed it to Winthrop. "Now that you have told

Señor Villara," he said, "it certainly seems that you are right. I see the 'L,' and I suppose that curve may easily be a 'z.' Thanks! You say you know the man. What do you advise me to do?"

"Nothing, Señor. This name Lomez—every Mexicano know that. What you say like Smeeth in Ingeleesh. I think, yes, I very much know this man." He looked at the other Mexican. "Señor Santos know him too, is it not?"

Santos, thus appealed to, regarded with indifference the speaker, who was smiling blandly in spite of the difficulty of the English language.

"He was writer," said Villara, as if to jog his countryman's memory, "secretaire to the leader of a society. But he no longer leader, Señor. *Carrambas!* everything change. The society no longer want him. It make me the chief. Villara now have honor to be leader. So it is!"

Villara spoke carelessly, without any apparent purpose. But Santos' color changed from olive to purple, and then to a pallor which under ordinary circumstances must have been observed by all his companions. Even the interest which the name of Lomez had created among the others did not prevent Winthrop from being keenly alive to the facial change. He had felt the constraint of the greeting between the two Mexicans, and now he fancied that he saw Villara watching with covert eagerness. For a moment Santos' lips twitched, then, controlled by an evident effort, they smiled suavely.

“ A thousand congratulations, Señor! The Society is fortunate to have for a leader a Villara. His reputation—his character—are they not known among his countrymen! ”

Santos' words were ostensibly polite. But Winthrop caught the sarcasm of the tones. “ Society? ” Did Villara also belong to some secret organization—to the same one, perhaps, which had met in the Apache Canyon? Why were the two men apparently at war? What was the secret between them which had brought that deathly pallor to Santos' cheeks?

Villara acknowledged Santos' remark with a wave of the hand. The motion left Winthrop in doubt as to whether it was intended to convey a sense of gratitude or the indifference of a superior. Villara turned to Eastcott.

“ But I—I have much power. Villara! Yes! He see you get your chauffeur and Lomez punish. The señors shall leave it to Villara.”

“ You mean you know where to look for the chauffeur? You notice the letter speaks of ‘ release,’ as if he were ‘ detained ’ against his will.”

“ Señor, I discover that ‘ *pronto.* ’ The man, he corraled, yes maybe. This Lomez hold him. To-morrow I go Santa Fé. You hear from me. You do nothing one, two, three days, it may be not more. I send your man.”

“ Villara is confident,” said Santos suddenly in a low, threatening voice. “ There are indeed many of the name ‘ Lomez.’ ”

Villara took the taunt with an easy smile.

“ This Lomez, you know him much—I know him little. He your friend, is it not so? ” he insinuated.

“ I know only a dog who lacks spirit—a rat who sneaks from danger,” said Santos bitterly. “ This Lomez is a coward—a—— ”

“ Ah, the Señor—he know this man! Did I not say it! ” interrupted the other in dramatic tones. “ You see, gentlemen—perhaps Señor Santos help you! Perhaps he tell us where Lomez hides with Americano chauffeur? ”

Santos turned, like a man who had been caught in his own trap.

“ Bah, I have nothing to do with his hiding. I know not his place. I do not trouble myself with matters of such littleness! ” He flung forth the words desperately. He longed to wring the necks of both Villara and Lomez, and again his hand went mechanically to his hip pocket. It was wellnigh unbearable to sit here and endure Villara’s insinuations and taunts. If it were true that the other was now the acknowledged leader of the *Junta*, as he said—Santos set his teeth.

“ But, Señor,—littleness? ” Villara played with his rival as a cat with a mouse. “ It is a littleness to help Americano? Is it thus that *you* speak, *you*, the friend of the Americano? ”

It was evident enough now to all at the table that the two Mexicans were fencing on dangerous ground. Though no one understood the nature of their antagonism, a rupture of some kind seemed imminent. It was Colonel Deering who,

with quick tact, interrupted a conversation which everybody was beginning to be aware held some deep significance.

“ Well, well, Santos! You’re getting into hot water all right.” He burst into a hearty laugh. “ You mustn’t forget you’re in the house of an ‘Americano,’ you know. But you needn’t be worried—we’ll turn the matter over to Señor Villara. What do you say, Señor—we shall see McNulty, dead or alive, within forty-eight hours? ”

“ Yes, my friend! You trust *me!* ” rejoined Villara with fervor. Winthrop, in the emphasis which the man placed upon the “ me,” detected an eagerness to continue the wordy rapier thrusts.

“ Señor Santos can be trusted to help all who need help,” said Evelyn with dignity. “ Daddy, has Señor Villara seen the burros? You must show them to him before he goes to Santa Fé, in order that he may be on the lookout for any new incumbents for us. I have a very fine translation of the last Spanish novel, Señor? Have you seen it? ” She turned to Santos with a smile, bending toward him with an apparent interest in her subject and in his answer that precluded any reply to Villara’s last remark. In a moment the other guests had taken the cue.

Winthrop, at his end of the table, thought with a lover’s pride what a charming hostess the girl made as she presided at her father’s table! But a thousand puzzling thoughts and questions suggested by the word-duel between the Mexicans were revolving in his brain. He could formulate

nothing of a definite or tangible nature. The mystery was deepening—or was he getting some clew? Santos and Villara both knew a man named Lomez. A Lomez knew where McNulty was “detained.” Could the man with the pointed beard, whom Evelyn had seen talking with McNulty, be named “Lomez”? The conversation and laughter of the company, now conspicuously gay, broke in upon his train of thought. He made an effort to clear his brain. But Evelyn was speaking to him down the length of the table, and he gave himself up to the charm of his first dinner in the Deering home.

The Evelyn of the Trail had been imaginative and full of poetic romance. But the Evelyn of the Home added to her imagination that captivating dignity that knew how to preserve harmony among her guests, and to romance a gracious tactfulness that made her in this new rôle more alluring than before. Winthrop could hardly take his eyes from the lovely, animated, oval face. Some day she would preside over another table, grace another home. He strained his eyes into the future to get some glimpse of the man who might share that shadowy dwelling and sit at the visionary table. But the years hung a veil over their secrets.

Until he is familiar with the surroundings of her daily life, no man ever truly knows the woman he loves. The pueblo village and the Indian boy, the high saddle and the tragic burros had added much to the revelation of that starry

night on the plains, when the wilderness had spoken to him as he knew it spoke to her. But it was the square garden, the big chair, the table of books by the fire, and the wide, oaken-beamed dining-room where she played hostess, that brought her more than ever near. He had wanted her before—wanted her as a beautiful jewel shot through with a thousand changing lights, as an exquisite poem to enrich the commonplace of life, as a fairy spirit whom he longed to protect and guard from all shadow or danger. But now he wanted her—how he wanted her!—as woman, as wife to make *his* home lovely, as hostess to *his* guests, as sweet and tender helpmeet! What was she—product of the East glorified by the freedom and beauty of the West, or daughter of the West touched by the culture of the East? It did not matter. She was distinct from types, a beautiful, joyous, rarely sympathetic woman, with the fine essence of ladyhood in her manners and in her heart, and the whispers of the angels in her soul! Wanted her? How he needed her! In the wilderness of the purple night he had thought he understood her—the Evelyn he knew and loved. But now in her home, it seemed to him that he understood her—the deeper, more radiant Evelyn she was yet to become! And all his understanding came but to this—he needed her—needed her!

The journey to Los Angeles, he thought to himself, must be completed, his work finished. But there were mails, and in letters he would tell all that there seemed now such small chance to say.

And once the tour was over, he would hurry back to the ranch and repeat the confession of Pecos. He had waited as he had promised, but the time was coming when he could wait no longer. And because once he had distrusted her and leaped falsely to the conclusion that she belonged to Santos, and because she had listened to his own love words by the ruined church, he dared now to hope and trust.

Late that afternoon Colonel Deering had led his male guests from the veranda to the inspection of the ranch. Against a wall of adobe, at some distance to the rear of the *hacienda*, they had seen a man squatting listlessly beside a blinking, motionless, little burro. "A Speculative miner!" the Colonel had explained with a note of pity in his voice. "One of those fellows who are the tramps of the Southwest, and who dream big dreams of the fabulous wealth with which one day they will dazzle the world! Under the magic of his hammer that poor chap believes every one of my bowlders will turn out ore. He has only to look to the mountain range there, and, by some witchcraft of his own, he can tell its exact per cent. of silver, and just what deposits of gold are in the strata of its cliffs. And yet when you wake up to-morrow you will find him just where you left him to-day."

Winthrop thought now of the dreamer, of the vacant eyes, the sunburned face under the thatch of shaggy hair and the old sombrero, of the donkey not much larger than a sheep and strapped

around with a mountainous pile of rations and outfit which must have weighed at least three hundred pounds. He, like the miner, had come to the Southwest silvering his dreams with hope. But to-night, in Evelyn's home, it did not seem possible to believe that he, too, could be doomed to survey his uncoined treasure with dotting glance and never to grasp its satisfying reality.

The room where the post-prandial coffee was served was a spacious apartment opening from the dining-room, and revealing glimpses of the firelit hall, with the dog and the Indian boy still crouched together on the rug. In one corner Evelyn's piano stood open, and by its side lay a guitar and Spanish castanets. Draperies of some gay Indian-hued stuff hung at the windows; Evelyn's pair of Norwich canaries, in an immense gilded cage, sung to the shaded lamplight; a Navajo blanket was flung across one end of the deep, low divan, and trailed its brilliant reds and blues down to the rug of gray wild-horse skin on the floor; the Colonel's gauntleted gloves and riding whip lay on a chair; on the walls framed photographs of European masterpieces of art, and several oil paintings—one of Venice and another a Dutch genre picture—mingled strangely with an Indian girl's white deerskin dress and elaborate moccasins, several gaudily beaded pipe-bags, and a long, embroidered knife-case. The room presented a curious combination of civilized Europe and half barbaric Southwest. But as Evelyn had *said*, it was a spot designed for living and com-

fort, and it had undoubtedly a certain "temperament" that made easy a realization of the pueblo village not far away and of the buttes and plains beyond.

In spite of Evelyn's pleasure in her friends that evening, she was far from feeling at ease. The newcomers, indeed, were charmed by their surroundings. "Brother Ambrose" went through his clumsy, laborious "tricks" with more than his usual delightful awkwardness. Pee-nah-wee spelled his repertoire of four English words in a faultlessly sing-song voice. Mrs. Eastcott rippled out Chopin waltzes on the piano; Winthrop made dozens of light-hearted jokes; Señor Villara relapsed into a safe silence, and the general conversation was amusing and unconventional.

Yet Evelyn was acutely aware of underlying inharmonies. Winthrop's hand touched hers as she held the stick for Ambrose's elephantine leaps, and the touch sent an unexpected electric current racing in her veins. The stranger cattleman silently watched Santos with a cat-like glance; and Santos himself seemed to have become recklessly eager to declare his love in every way but words before the whole company. Worst of all, and most troublesome, were her own thoughts which would not be stilled. She had promised Santos help in his work. Did that promise, and the manner in which it was asked and given, imply another, that even now he accepted as binding her definitely to him? Had she already taken the great step which changes a woman's whole career?

This evening Santos, as well as Winthrop, called her "Evelyn," as if in his mind there was no further doubt concerning their mutual relations. She had seen Mrs. Eastcott and her father exchange significant glances at the Mexican's form of address, and she had felt an odd desire to apologize. Was she, after all, only flirting with both her lovers, when she had just promised herself to one? The thought filled her with sudden consternation.

Mrs. Eastcott and her father were pacing the hall together in earnest, low-toned conversation. She looked at them almost wistfully. They had both known love. Was it love that she had promised Santos under the pines at the edge of the *vegas*, love that had had no power to refuse his kisses? Evelyn sighed. Of course it was love, and she must tell Winthrop at once that she could not think again of his words at Pecos. But she had always supposed that love brought radiance, and she felt to-night only restlessness and a curious, unwonted excitement.

But Evelyn was not the only member of the party who was conscious of a disturbing unrest on that particular evening. Emilio Santos moved nervously about, lighting cigarette after cigarette only to throw them, half-smoked, into the fire. He hovered over Evelyn with conspicuous devotion, addressing his conversation to her in rather a loud voice, and occasionally bending over her for more intimate *sotto voce* gallantries. He was *acutely* conscious of Villara's watchful eyes,

though for all the attention he apparently paid to the other member of the *Junta*, Villara might have been some unimportant part of the furniture. Santos' angry fear at dinner had now changed to an angrier defiance. Who was Villara, this uneducated upstart who could not even speak good English, to tell a Santos whom to love or not to love? What had a Santos to fear? A Santos would show Villara, and the *Junta*, too, if necessary, who was leader. The great Pan-Mexican movement should yet be led to victory by a Santos. Already he had won Evelyn's promise to marry him. The time would have been ripe to announce it in words except for Villara's interference. Now he must leave at once for the *Junta* to find out for himself how matters really stood. But in a day or two all would be right, and Evelyn would stand before the world as his promised bride. Once he was married to her, she would forgive any little deception as to the exact nature of his work and devote herself to her husband's mission. Though he loved her desperately, and she appealed strongly to the romantic and esthetic sides of his nature, he was not blind to the effect that her beauty and her personality would have upon his weak-kneed countrymen. She would add inestimably to his own power and become the dominating factor in his future success. Now as he bent over her, he felt recklessly confident. He was not afraid. The world might see his passion and know that he gloried in it. He picked up the guitar that lay by the piano.

“ Give us a tune, Señor,” suggested Eastcott cordially. “ I’m no romantic chap, like a Spaniard, but I used to get a ditty now and then myself out of that instrument in college days.”

Santos looked at Evelyn, who sat in a low chair under a red and white Indian plaque, the Pueblo boy just behind her, and the dog at her feet. “ You permit? ” he asked gallantly.

“ Indeed I do! ” she said, adding to the others, “ Señor Santos plays like——”

“ An Orpheus! ” laughed Deering, as the Mexican ran his fingers over the guitar.

Santos struck a chord, tightened a string, and played a light, dancing melody with sure and practiced skill. Then he turned to face Evelyn, and without further preliminary began to sing.

“ O Love, my passion passes understanding,
I understand it, yes, but 'twill not be expressed.
I go to hide my sighing and my anguish
There in the desert, where my spirit is at rest.”

The words were a familiar translation of an Indian song, set to a vibrating, plaintive-sweet melody that swept over the strings of the guitar with all the abandon and mystery of the wilderness.

The Colonel and Mrs. Eastcott lingered in the shadows of the background to listen. Winthrop, a little to the rear of the Pueblo boy, could not see Evelyn’s face, but neither he nor Señor Villara, who leaned forward intently at the first word,

missed a detail of Santos' expression nor a syllable of the song.

But Santos did not appear to care now who heard or understood his message to the American girl. He was reckless, desperate. In his heart he dared Villara to do his worst. The world itself to-night might look and listen.

With the second verse of the Indian love song, the singer's voice deepened to a wild tenderness and tragedy. The flashing, black eyes met Evelyn's in unconcealed passion. He bent toward her to emphasize the significance of his words.

“ O lament not what you did, Beloved:

I lament not that to Love you did enslave me;
Only do I regret that once you did forsake me
For another who is less of soul than we.

“ Ah, like to him that has the stringed guitar,
And not the knowledge how to play,
So goes the world untuned to him forever
Who feels, but feeling, has no power to say.”

The listeners at the doorway turned away abruptly at the boldness of the thrust at Winthrop. Villara gave a sinister, sneering half-smile; even Eastcott shifted uneasily in his chair as if this were a joke not entirely in good taste. Winthrop himself appeared quite unmoved, but closely attentive to the performance.

Evelyn alone failed to notice the bold allusion. She had never heard Santos sing before, and the

beauty and tenderness of his voice took her completely by surprise. His eyes held hers. Her color came and went. She sat motionless, and while he struck the chords of the guitar the musician played also upon the strings of her heart. The sweet, languorous melody, the rich chords, and the throbbing, masculine voice filled the room. With her eyes on the Mexican's, she floated in a music-perfumed dream among the splendors of the rainbow-tinted rocks and the opal, sun-kissed mists of a Southwest touched to a wild romance by Indian legends and memories of a dead Past. The Southwest and Emilio Santos summoned her. Why had she ever hesitated to answer to their call? Did her eyes speak now to him as his impassioned words to her? Did he understand? The Southwest called. She had promised. She would follow.

The music rose and fell—rose to a crescendo of longing—then died away in a sigh.

CHAPTER XXI

WINTHROP, in spite of his apparent indifference, was not unmoved by Santos' song. He understood perfectly that it was a defiant insult to a rival. Furthermore, his natural resentment was increased by the effect of the melody upon Evelyn. While she sat leaning forward with her eyes fixed on the Mexican's as if fascinated, Winthrop, in spite of his outward calm, secretly writhed with anger and jealousy. He glanced at Villara, who was leering with an air of evident triumph. There was no mistaking the stranger's interest in the scene. Winthrop felt that everyone else, with the exception of those two—Evelyn and Villara—must be regarding him with commiseration and curiosity. He did not dare to look at his uncle. Neither did he dare to act upon his natural impulse to leave the scene and thus shake off the oppressive atmosphere.

Santos was making ardent and unconcealed love to Evelyn. Winthrop, thoroughly awakened from the half-dreamy content of the last few days and of his contemplation of his hostess at dinner, was keenly alive to the affront to himself and to the danger of the spell which the song seemed to exert over Evelyn. The blood surged to his head. Mad impulses swayed him—the desire to spring

at Santos—to denounce him as a political conspirator—to defy him publicly. It was with difficulty that he held himself outwardly serene.

As the last notes of the Indian melody died away, there was an awkward pause. Then Evelyn rose to her feet with a nervous laugh. As if the charm of the music had been broken, the buzz of conversation filled the room. But Winthrop was not of the temper of Wellington's soldiers, who in Spain made friends of the French between battles. He and Santos were now at open war. Accordingly, at the first opportunity he excused himself to his host, and with a general "good-night" retired, ostensibly to bed but in reality to the outer air, where, at some little distance from the house, he strolled restlessly to and fro and puffed viciously at his pipe.

The sky was hung with clouds, but the darkness was faintly illuminated by the rays from a veranda lamp. The silence was broken only by the occasional cry of an owl. The cool air blew gently into his face, as if it were some human thing striving with tender fingers to calm his fever. Winthrop, however, only clenched his fists. A thousand plans chased each other through his brain—plans for entrapping Santos—plans for his own success. He said to himself that he would not wait until his return from Los Angeles to tell Evelyn again of his love. He would force her, if need be, into an assent to his proposal the very next day. Moreover, he now had definite proof of *Santos'* duplicity. Santos knew Lomez. Lomez

had "detained" McNulty. Santos had some kind of a grudge against McNulty; in Chicago he had snapped his fingers in the chauffeur's face. Therefore Santos must have instigated Lomez's action. Santos belonged to a political secret society. The society which met in the Mexican adobe house in the Apache Canyon was in some way the cause of Santos' antagonism for McNulty. Winthrop grew hot and cold with excitement.

But after a time the air and the silence had their effect. He began to consider the situation more rationally. He saw that he must avoid any step which might prove unjustifiable, since his suspicions of Santos were based upon the most flimsy substructure of facts. He bethought himself of Villara. The man was an old acquaintance of the Mexican's. Villara, presumably, knew more about Santos' life than did Colonel Deering. Winthrop made up his mind to win Villara's confidence before the cattleman left the ranch, and—— He brought himself up abruptly. Where was Love leading him? To sneaking methods of procuring information against a rival—to meeting intrigue by intrigue?

It might have been half an hour that Winthrop had paced up and down in the darkness when a footfall suddenly sounded behind him and he turned. A tiny point of light was advancing toward him. A delicate perfume of cigarette smoke floated on the breeze. Either by chance or by purpose Santos had discovered his retreat. In the dim light he could see that the Mexican was

smiling—that scornful, confident smile that had been irritating even in Chicago.

Santos raised his hat with a cold politeness.

Conscious of the mockery of the action, Winthrop, who was by nature too frank to be clever at concealing his feelings even had he so desired, gave no sign of greeting, but looked his rival up and down in the semi-darkness.

“Señor Hammond forgets his accustomed graciousness,” Santos remarked with a covert sneer. “Perhaps it is that he finds this is a good time to be alone.”

Winthrop regarded the other with undisguised resentment. “Señor Santos takes an unwelcome opportunity to renew an acquaintance which he has hitherto found it inconvenient to acknowledge,” he answered stiffly.

“The Southwest has its rules about acquaintanceship—rules which the East——”

“You mean?” interrupted Winthrop.

“That I—Emilio Santos—beg the honor of teaching Mr. Winthrop Hammond of these little rules.” He bowed low. “The Señor will be an apt pupil.”

“Thanks; your rules are not wanted any more than your company,” answered Winthrop with blunt directness.

“I regret it, Señor, that the sentiment is not mutual. But I have something of condolence then to offer to you. You understand—it is of Miss Deering I speak.” He raised his hat again at mention of Evelyn’s name.

For all reply Winthrop gave a low laugh. The picture of Evelyn presiding at the head of her father's table rose before him. It seemed to him almost profanation that this man should speak of her at all.

Santos was quite imperturbed by the mocking sound. "The lady might not prefer that I speak of her with you, Señor. But it is better that you should know."

"The rules, the little lesson, Mr. Santos—have you not forgotten them?" answered Winthrop tauntingly.

Santos approached him impulsively. "You shall have them, sir. One of them is that you leave here."

Winthrop laughed again, this time even more mockingly than before. "And the reason?"

"I shall tell you. It is a pity to mar the Americano's pleasure, but you have seen; you have eyes—ears—Mr. Hammond. The beautiful Señorita—she has given her heart. You embarrass her. Your pretensions——"

Winthrop stood over him threateningly. "Who told you to talk like that? Who put that lie in your mouth?"

"Ah! did I not say it was sadness to spoil your foolish dreams? You are angry. I tell you the truth, and you call it a lie. *Carrambas!* In New Mexico we kill the man who forgets himself."

"Truth?" cried Winthrop tauntingly.

"We shall not waste words. The Señorita Eve-

lina—she is mine! ” He touched his heart lightly with the tips of his fingers.

Winthrop felt a blind impulse to strike out into the shadows and hurl the Mexican's words back into the sneering face. He clenched his fists tighter than before. “ Yours! ” he exclaimed scornfully.

“ Yes. Have you not seen this evening? She has promised that we marry.”

“ I don't believe it.” Winthrop drew himself up and squared his shoulders. “ I don't believe that she would have even one word to say to you if she knew what kind of a fellow you really are.”

“ Enough! Enough! ” cried Santos hotly. “ I give you a warning—Go! ”

“ And if I refuse? ”

“ It is force, then, that shall send you! ”

“ You insolent devil! ” ejaculated Winthrop, hardly able to contain himself for wrath. “ Get out of my path! ” He turned toward the house blindly, not daring to trust his self-control.

Santos waved his arm with a courtly sweep. “ The night and the plains, Señor—they are yours. I remain. You shall repent your insults to a Santos,” he threatened.

“ A Greaser, you mean—a man who has played his game of deceit too long.”

With a low cry of rage, Santos snatched at his revolver. There was a glint of steel in the dim light, and Winthrop sprang forward to seize the Mexican. In the same moment Santos had fallen backward over a tree-stump and lay pros-

trate. Winthrop seized the revolver and flung it far out into the darkness.

“ Coward! ” he exclaimed, as the other sprang to his feet. “ What were you doing in the Apache Canyon the other night? Suppose we march in now and tell Colonel Deering and Señor Villara that you’re engaged to marry the lovely Señorita? No!—it’s my turn to talk now! Why did you tell me Miss Deering had left Chicago for this ranch? Why did you cut me dead when we were introduced at Falls City? Suppose we explain these little things to Miss Deering and her father now! ”

Santos stamped his foot. “ Fool! ” he hissed. “ What do I care for your threatening? But I warn you—already you have gone too far! ”

“ I’ve not done yet,” said Winthrop, cool enough now that the situation was in his own hands. “ Let’s finish the list. There’s McNulty—what about him? What about Lomez? Who’s behind that little game? The ‘ society ’? Does your future bride know what you are up to? Shall we announce it all at breakfast to-morrow morning, with the news of your engagement? ”

“ Dog! ” cried Santos, bringing his face close to Winthrop’s in the darkness. “ Dog of an Americano—spy! You would tell of the Apache Canyon? You would steal the girl from me? I have given you warning. I——”

Out of the darkness a hand touched the Mexican on the shoulder. “ Your gun, O one-time leader! ” said a sly voice in Spanish.

Señor Villara extended the weapon which Winthrop had flung aside.

Santos turned on the newcomer with dismay. “*Diabolo!*” he cried, and snapped the gun in his compatriot’s face.

Villara shrugged his angular shoulders. “*Gracias, Compadre!* It shoot not. I prevent.” He laughed sardonically. “You have given me news. I give you news—ver-r-y important, O Betrothed of the fair Americano! *Buenos noches.* Señor Hammond!”

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN Winthrop awoke the next morning, already the feverish events of the night before seemed to him unreal. His spirit had reveled in a riot of passion from the thought of which he now shrank in disgust.

He gazed out of the small windows upon the unfamiliar scene, in an effort to dispel unwelcome memories. A pale, blue mist hung over the mountains, while light clouds floated like tongues of lurid flame in the eastern sky between broad ribbons of purpling rose and gold. Dwarf cedars and mesquite—soft and velvety shadows amid the duns and reds of sand and rock—seemed to be climbing the hillsides for a peep at the dreaming *vegas* where cattle fed knee-deep in the tall, bunch-grass and sage. Over all was the peace of a vast solitude, broken only by the rustling of the wind in the nearby cottonwoods or by the occasional twitter of a bird. He could see the spot where he and Santos had enacted that churlish melodrama, of the ignominy of which he was now heartily ashamed. For a moment his gaze remained fixed; then he turned away with an impatient gesture of annoyance.

Though the hour was still early, the invitation of the morning and the novelty of his surroundings

tempted him forth, and it was not long before he had passed under the *ramada* of the house to the trail which led across the ranch. From the elevation of a small, wooded knoll, he looked back upon the ranch house and the quarters of the ranchmen to the rear of the main building. The structure seemed strangely out of place in the panorama of Nature. A few hours and the voices of his kind would drown the mysterious sighing whisper of the plains and the wild message of the blue hills. But now, in the early morning, he had the world to himself, and he yielded unreservedly to the enjoyment of the scene. This was the ranch he had journeyed so far to visit—the ranch of which Evelyn had written! He thought of the big, red circle which he had drawn on his United States map in New York, and of the vague mental pictures he had conceived weeks before. As his gaze roamed over the wide extent of pasturage, plain, and hill, and his mind dwelt on the hundred and one details of a life so new to him, he was more than willing to admit that Evelyn's praises were fully justified. No wonder she loved it—this wild, free life of the Southwest. The earth and the sky were hers; no human being disputed with her their possession. The moving clouds spoke to her a familiar tongue. The plains smiled; the mountains guarded her from the storm and stress of the world. The people of her pueblo village, and the ill-starred burros whom she befriended, looked up to her as their earthly Providence and All.

And it was from this that he vied with Santos

to wrest her—for this that he would substitute the crowded ways of New York!

In the freshness of the morning sunshine, the remembrance of last night's quarrel grew momentarily more distasteful to Winthrop. Not for a moment did he believe the assertion that Evelyn's heart was pledged to Santos. Had Evelyn promised to marry the Mexican, the fact would have been proclaimed publicly. The Colonel would have announced it to his guests, or if an announcement was not considered timely, both Santos and the girl would have carefully kept the secret until some more opportune occasion. But though the boast of the Mexican did not trouble him, his own share in the angry scene humiliated him. Had Love taught him no lesson of forbearance and coolness? Had these great wilds spoken to him in vain of nobility and patience? Even had he been perfectly certain that Evelyn really belonged to another, there would have been no excuse for the scene to which he had lent himself. A man who loved a lesser woman might play a little part. But one who loved Evelyn must prove himself in some measure worthy of his ideal.

Winthrop made his way slowly from the knoll toward the corral, where a rough looking, red-shirted wrangler was roping horses, and cowboys were slouching to and fro, or loping off across the plain on bronchos. A man in loose, flannel shirt and "chaps" was taking the kinks out of his lasso, preparatory to rounding up some "strays." Another was gulping down a hasty

breakfast of coffee and bacon which he had set out for himself on the top of an overturned box. Leaning against an adobe hut was the dreamer of the day before, his patient ass beside him—both alike indifferent to all around them—both symbolizing the hopelessness of inanition.

From the corral Winthrop followed the stream which flowed from the mountains to bring the precious gift of rejuvenescence to the plains. On and on he walked, till he reached a little canyon that dropped down between the foothills as though cut by a sharp knife in the rock. Beyond, where the rivulet flowed out from the hills, he could see the broad stretches of the *vegas*, always beautiful even in the mild autumn and winter of the Southwest. Further yet, massive blue slopes alternated with gigantic, basaltic heaps that marked the path of a long-forgotten lava flow. The New Mexico that he had imagined before he left New York had been old and bent and wrinkled, asleep for many thousand years. But the New Mexico he had found was fresh and smiling.

Winthrop had walked for some time, lost in revery and the beauty of the scene, before he turned back toward the corral again. A hungry crowd of men now swarmed around the cook, who doled out hot biscuit and steak on tin platters. The men interested Winthrop hugely, and he fell in with the "boys" with a zest which astonished even himself and quite won his new friends. His spirit was refreshed and strengthened by the *society* of these vigorous, brave Sons of the West.

They were like a long breath of the bracing morning air, or a drink from a pure, cold mountain stream when one is thirsty and parched with fever past.

He strolled back to the ranch house at last, at peace with himself and the world. He was even inclined to laugh, rather cynically, at the quarrel of the night before and at the threats that he and Santos had hurled at one another. He, for one, would show himself ready to hold his tongue about what had happened, and would meet the enemy halfway in outward friendliness. He wondered vaguely what had passed between Santos and Villara when left together.

Evelyn was on the veranda. As Winthrop came near he caught sight of the flutter of her dress in the sunlight, and over the back of a wicker lounging chair he had a glimpse of the heavy brown coils of her hair. At once his heart began to beat with delightful anticipation, and he hurried his steps eagerly till he reached the veranda almost on a run.

She must have heard him coming, recognized perhaps his footsteps, for she looked up at him without surprise. "Brother Ambrose" sat with his great head on her knee, and she made no attempt to rise.

"Good-morning!" she said. "Is the inspection over so soon? Mr. Eastcott told us he saw you departing early with a very businesslike air to get points for the weekly letter. Did you find matters quite to your satisfaction?"

Though she spoke lightly, her eyes looked heavy and she was paler than usual. Winthrop noticed, as he sank into the chair opposite hers, that the hand that stroked Ambrose's silky ears trembled. Had she any inkling of what had happened the night before? Or, if she really loved Santos, was she pained by the humiliation of her Mexican lover at the dinner table before her father and his guests?

"I certainly did," he answered. "When I have become rich off the profits of the ideal newspaper I intend to establish I shall buy a ranch myself, where I can retire to write the books which are to add the crown to my fame."

"Splendid! And you must have an Ambrose," she said, looking at the dog absently. "A ranch without an Ambrose is like a mountain without a mist."

"Or a Mesa Encantada without an Acoma!"

"Oh, no! A Mesa Encantada without an Acoma is even more romantic than it would be with it—more suggestive—more tragic and haunting. Is it not, Frater?" And she pinched the tip of a long, silky ear.

Winthrop was thinking that now that Evelyn was before him it was less easy to be generous to Santos than it had been alone on the *vegas*. Her very pallor aroused in him a jealous pang. Suddenly he remembered that he owed her an explanation. He had not yet told her about the detective in Santa Fé. He hesitated, asking himself *how* he should open the distasteful subject. But

Evelyn herself gave him the opportunity he desired.

“Do you really think that Señor Villara will—find McNulty?” she asked haltingly, with a slight tremble in her voice. She spoke more as if she endeavored to fill a pause than as if she were greatly interested.

“Shouldn’t wonder! He seemed pretty positive. By the way, I must tell you what I did in Santa Fé, Evelyn. I hope you’ll forgive me. I’ve kept my promise of secrecy all right about your—er—abduction. I’ve pledged the detective to silence as far as the public is concerned.”

“Detective!” exclaimed the girl, interested enough now.

“Why, yes! You see McNulty’s disappearance and lots of other suspicious circumstances made me feel that I could not let the matter drop, as my uncle was inclined to do. I didn’t even tell him, however, what I had done till that letter came from the Lomez chap. Uncle John agrees with me now that I wasn’t so far wrong in taking the bull by the horns. You must admit, Evelyn, that one can’t let a man disappear without making some effort to find him. He might have been murdered, or in some kind of trouble, though to be frank with you, that wasn’t exactly what I thought then. But it begins to look as if McNulty really did need help. He may not be so bad as I thought.” He paused anxiously. He wanted Evelyn to justify his action and to understand that he had kept to the letter of his

promise to her. At the same time he must not alarm her by telling her that it was really his anxiety for her safety that had induced him to engage the secret detective. If he had imagined at Santa Fé that he could tell her everything he saw now that he must continue to guard for the present his unproven suspicions. They were too closely bound up with his rival not to seal his lips at the moment. The safety of the chauffeur was his strongest appeal.

Evelyn was too sensible and too truly sympathetic to obtrude her own desire for secrecy before the chauffeur's possible distress. She herself would have liked well enough to unravel the mystery of her abduction, could it have been accomplished without her father's knowledge. Winthrop was relieved to find that she nodded approval of his course.

"Of course, Winthrop, you have done just right," she agreed. "But Señor Villara will take the matter off our hands now."

"Hope so! Perhaps I'd better have a word with him before he goes off."

"Why, he has gone already!" said Evelyn. "He left early, directly after breakfast—or rather, after his breakfast. Father saw him off. And Señor Santos has gone, too. Didn't you know that?"

"Gone? Santos? With Villara?" cried Winthrop in astonishment.

"Oh, no! Not with Señor Villara. I don't *think* they like each other very well. Señor Santos

went off two hours ago. He told me business called him most unexpectedly to Santa Fé for a day or two."

Winthrop leaned back in his chair. Santos had gone! Left in a hurry! Then he had really been lying about the "engagement," and was afraid to meet the threatened revelations of the morning. Winthrop smiled cheerfully upon Evelyn, congratulating himself upon this unexpected proof of his own astuteness. As if glad to dismiss the matter from his mind, he abruptly changed the subject by telling her of his breakfast with the cowboys. As Evelyn listened, the air of abstraction which Winthrop had noticed the previous day was again apparent. He felt as if she were waiting politely for him to finish his story in order that she might communicate something with which her mind was preoccupied. He paused.

"I've another piece of news for you," she said, with a little, nervous laugh. "You must be prepared to be surprised, as I am. Father told me this morning that he and Mrs. Eastcott arranged last evening that we are to go on with you to California!" She sat very straight now, as if she braced herself for something she had yet to say or to expect. The St. Bernard, feeling the tenseness of her attitude, rose and stood beside her, lashing his great tail lazily to and fro, first against her dress and then against Winthrop's chair. But neither the man nor the girl noticed him.

With her words Winthrop had drawn a long

breath, as if the news were too good to be true. "Evelyn!" he cried, starting forward and catching both her hands.

She drew back hurriedly. "Oh, but you must not be pleased, Winthrop! It doesn't mean anything—my going!" she said. He laughed incredulously. "Father has to go to California about some irrigation project. And your uncle and aunt have persuaded him to go along with them in our own car."

"Bully for them!" cried Winthrop. He thought of his vanished rival with almost a feeling of commiseration. "And I thought I had to say '*Au Revoir*' to you to-morrow. Now we've got days and days together!"

Evelyn broke in upon his elation with disconcerting gravity. "But you mustn't be happy about it, Winthrop. You remember the time—I was carried away from Raton, and you—you found me—and what you said at Pecos?"

"Yes, dear!" he answered, puzzled. "I stand by every word I said then—and by everything I did." He smiled reassuringly, wondering at his good fortune.

"Well—Winthrop—I—I—want to tell you that I know you have been very kind and patient with me, and—and that I think ever and ever so much of you, but—but—we must just be friends. I never can think of you—as—as——"

Winthrop's face blanched. He was wholly unprepared for this sudden dash of cold water upon *his spirits*.

“ Never—as what? ” he gasped.

“ As your—as my——” She paused helplessly.

“ You mean you can’t love me? ” he said, instinctively coming to her rescue.

“ Yes,” she said.

“ Never? ”

“ Never! ”

It was out at last, the hesitating denial of all his hopes and dreams—the word Evelyn had nerved herself to speak. Winthrop, as well as Santos, had his answer. But suddenly to her own surprise her eyes were wet with unbidden tears. He looked so hurt and so utterly astonished!

Winthrop stared at her. He could hardly believe that he heard aright. Santos had gone. She was to accompany the Eastcotts to California. And yet she could “ never think of him as——” He could not comprehend.

“ I have to go,” she said, some strange telepathic instinct interpreting his thought. “ It is best. But I could not go unless you understood how matters were between us. And, Winthrop, I want you to be sensible. Most men would feel that what I have said just now to you and my presence for the rest of the journey were an impossible combination for them. They would just leave everything—and I should have spoiled the trip and made everybody uncomfortable.”

He thought to himself dully that she had spoiled the trip already. But he made no reply, only continued to stare at her with that bruised look that made her think of the St. Bernard’s expression

when once he cut his great paw on some broken glass.

“ You are different from other men. You can do things they could not and be strong where they would be weak.”

His lip curled a little with bitterness. But he asked without emotion, “ What is it that you wish me to do? ”

“ To go along on the journey as if nothing had happened. Of course everyone will think, just as they have before, that we are nothing but friends.” His lip curled again. “ It may be rather awkward just at first, but we really are and always shall be splendid friends. And friends can do a great deal for the sake of each other.”

“ But, Evelyn—I may still say that, I suppose? —I am not made of—putty! ” He was going to say iron, but putty seemed more like the flabby, pliable, inane thing she was asking him to be.

She smiled the ghost of her old-time smile. “ Of course not,” she said. “ I suppose it is rather a hard thing for you to do. But father has to go to Los Angeles and I must go with him. Naturally, he does not know that—that you think of me—as you do. Do you remember once at Kansas City you told me that you would do penance for not trusting me? Well, this shall be your penance.”

He looked from her out across the *vegas* to the mountains. The New Mexico that had been so beautiful was suddenly old and withered again, *cruel*, *mocking* as it had been on the day he had

followed her across the plains from Raton. She did not love him. She would never marry him. She would never advise with him about the great ideal newspaper he was to establish. She would never help him write the books on the dream ranch with the dream dog by their side. And she was asking him to journey in her company to California as her "friend." Of what, indeed, did she think him made?

Ambrose flopped down on the veranda floor with a long sigh. His huge bulk made a sound that recalled Winthrop to the need of a reply.

"I don't believe I can do it, Evelyn," he said. "I'm not strong enough to keep a rein on myself. I should be making love to you the first chance I had, and trying to change your mind. And if I didn't do that I'd be too beastly miserable company to be willing to show my face before my aunt and all the rest of you. No! I'll clear out, and get some other newspaper chap to go along in my place." He spoke dully, with his eyes on the distant mountains. He did not care what he did now. The sooner he could get away to hide the effects of the blow he had received, the better.

"Winthrop," she said softly, "you told me at Pecos that I did not need to be afraid of you. I am not afraid of you. You are stronger than you think. Of course, either one of us could make a scene and refuse to go. But it would embarrass the others, and make matters a thousand times more awkward than they are now. I want you to go. I don't want your work upset. This trip

may mean something for your future, and I'm enough of a friend to desire your success. Won't you do this for me, even though—things—can't be between us as you wish? For me, Winthrop?"

He saw the tears in her eyes now. Strange that there should be tears when she had just refused his love!

But she had not forbidden him to worship her, to spend himself in her protection, to crucify himself for her happiness. She could not refuse him that had she desired. And it was to that worship and supreme devotion that she now, unconsciously, made her appeal. The tears were in her eyes—those beautiful, dear, brown eyes that should be full of laughter and light. And they were there because he suffered.

He drew a long, sighing breath as the dog had done. There should be no tears in her eyes that he could wipe away. "Yes," he said slowly, with an effort, "I will do it—for you!"

She reached out her hand impulsively. "Oh, thank you! Now we can all go together and be happy. And you will be happy? I do care for you very much in one way, you know, and—and I am so—sorry to have disappointed you! You will be happy?"

"Yes!" he said quietly. "I shall be—happy."

She rose as he spoke, and Winthrop rose with her.

"I think I will go up to my room for a little while. I have some writing I ought to do." He paused. "You really mean it, Evelyn? You

don't—you don't love me? ” He brought out the word with difficulty, feeling suddenly his vast conceit that he should ever have supposed she could care for him.

“ No! ” she answered in a whisper.

He turned away slowly, and went up the stairs to his room. He could not argue, press his suit. Other men might meet denial in that way. But such persuasion seemed to him unmanly.

No; Evelyn's word was law. She should be happy in her own way. And he would do what he could to make her so. Only—— He thought of Santos. Santos had spoken the truth!

Evelyn, downstairs on the veranda with her arms around the St. Bernard's neck and her tears falling on his rough coat, was thinking how much more tragic was Winthrop's grave, quiet acceptance of her decision than the stormy, passionate protests Santos would have made.

CHAPTER XXIII

ALTHOUGH several days had elapsed since the departure of Villara from the ranch, no news had come either from him or from McNulty. Villara might have forgotten the incident, or have found himself powerless to aid McNulty—in which event he had presumably dropped the matter from his mind.

Eastcott and his nephew talked the situation over with Colonel Deering, with the result that shortly before the party again took to the trail westward, Winthrop telegraphed the contents of the letter from "Lomez" to the detective at Santa Fé. The reply was not reassuring. The secret agent stated he was endeavoring to locate "Lomez," for there was every reason to believe that the missing chauffeur was connected with the recent murder of a Mexican. He hoped to have startling revelations to make within the course of a day or two.

Upon receipt of this news, Eastcott shook his head gravely. "I think it likely that you were right, Win, from the first. It begins to look as if the fellow were really a desperate character."

"I fancy we're well rid of him anyway," said Winthrop grimly.

A new complication had arisen. Since the re-

ceipt of the letter from "Lomez" it had been reasonably possible to whitewash McNulty's character. But now, in the light of the detective's communication, the fellow was revealed as a thousand times worse than Winthrop's gravest suspicions had ever painted him. McNulty was perhaps a murderer. Was it "Lomez" who was referred to as the "Mexican"?

On the morning that the two automobiles set forth from the ranch toward Arizona, Winthrop dispatched a private message to his agent in the Capital. The man was instructed to find out what relation "Lomez" held to the ranchman, Emilio Santos, and to communicate with Señor Villara.

Evelyn, seated beside her father in the Deering automobile, could not but recall the last journey she had made with the Eastcotts. Then McNulty had been at the wheel, and Winthrop had been at her side. Now Winthrop as often as possible avoided her society; McNulty was probably involved in a terrible tragedy, and Santos—where was Emilio Santos?

Since the morning when he had sent her a hasty message announcing his sudden departure, and begging for a moment's interview, she had neither seen nor heard from him. He had said then that he would return in two or three days. He had urged that till they met again she take no one into her confidence as to what had passed between them. Though she had shrunk from him, half-alarmed, he had suddenly seized her and caressed her, then hurried away. Now the situation in

which she found herself was one of embarrassment to her self-respect. While at moments she felt herself still under the spell of his Indian love song and of his aspirations for the uplift of his people, at others she could not entirely drown a certain resentment of his unconventionality—that very unconventionality which had always hitherto attracted her to him so strongly.

What had become of Santos? Why did he not return? Why did he not write? She looked at her father seated so calmly beside her in the automobile, and she felt sick at heart with a sense of guilt and uncertainty. She had never had a secret from him before. Ought she not to tell him at once all that Emilio Santos had said to her? Or should she wait, one—two days longer? She did not look ahead to life with Santos; she lived only in the present, wondering why his message did not come and oppressed with a vague, formless fear.

Colonel Deering's car was a high-powered machine, painted in dull gray, and looking as though it had served its apprenticeship to the rough trails of the region until, weather-beaten and seasoned, it could be relied upon to hold together at any angle or on any grade, so long as it had four wheels on which to travel. Like a hardened broncho, which would not sell in any market on looks and which thrives on any kind of food, the automobile had long since passed the prudish pride of the town car. It had such a tremendous clearance that no high-centered, "hog-backed" road

ever managed to disconcert it. It ran equally well on cleaning fluid or on gasoline, and delighted, in true Western fashion, to progress on the open muffler. Thus the Transcontinental journey, now that the Deerings had joined the party, became a decidedly lively progression as the two cars wound their way among the echoing hills.

The road from the ranch into Arizona led over lava strewn tracks which threaded the rolling plains. There was an appalling number of "high-centers," of "wash-outs," and of goodly sized gullies which often swallowed trail and landscape in their voracious jaws. For Eastcott and his chauffeur the journey was one of unrelieved and anxious strain. It seemed to them that the road was doing its best to tear mechanical soul and body apart, and they were in doubt as to just how long the see-sawing and violent lurches could continue. Where two hollow cones rose from the edge of a small lake, which nursed its briny waters in the bosom of an old crater, the cars made a steep plunge down the trail, and at once became the cynosure of curious Mexican eyes from the tiny village on the shores. The people, who were engaged in gathering salt from the Laguna Salina de Zunia for the stockmen of the region, had evidently never seen a "devil wagon" in their crater before, and when the tourists paused for a careful survey of the track ahead, they flocked about with astonished eyes and gaping mouths. For the next dozen miles, there was good reason for wondering whether or no the actual route to the Axi-

zona border line had been missed altogether. Often progress was impossible without the building of a temporary roadbed of greasewood and sage across bad "washes." At other times the trail climbed steep, rocky mountainsides to bare and level mesas, where the wind played a weird music to prowling coyotes and dim wraith shapes of lofty buzzards. The eerie uncertainty as to grades and surfaces, the prospects of break-neck, toboggan-like slides, and unnegotiable impasses, hushed the travelers to a silence, half-awed, half-anxious.

Where New Mexico and Arizona blend as the colors in the rainbow melt into one another by almost imperceptible nuances of radiant light, a well-defined road, often cut steeply through the black lava cliffs, began to make its appearance. At first the country differed only slightly from the terrain just traversed. The Arizona of the mighty forests and the petrified, prehistoric vegetation, of the giant cactus and the desert sands, of canyons and cliff dwellings, of legendary ruins, and the magic of vari-colored rocks, was not yet revealed, for Nature is a show-woman who studies well the timing of her "curtains." But already the road had become wider, and though as yet it appeared to lead to nowhere in particular, it had an air of importance not unfitted to a highway of such splendid distances and noble traditions. It was purely a traveler's road, having no concern whatever with the near-at-hand, and its course took in a wide expanse. There were few houses or

human settlements along its borders, and the occasional adobe hut, which had the temerity to appear in view, had a sorry look of neglect and dilapidation, as if the trail occupied itself only with the great centers of habitation for which it made.

There is a certain romantic satisfaction in traveling through a solitary land. But to Winthrop Hammond this journey through Arizona was a form of torture he would have gladly escaped. Evelyn had not the faintest idea that the task she had set him—this continuance of the trip as if nothing had happened to tear his heart into ribbons—was almost more than he could endure. To meet her every morning as she came down rosy from the night's sleep, to breakfast perhaps in her company, to travel all day within the range of her voice and smile, to write his report in wayside camp beneath her eyes, to view the passing scene in her company, and to exchange with her the light banter of companionship, to keep a cheerful front to the world that he might not be "the death's head at the feast" and make everyone uncomfortable, and above all never to reproach her nor to consciously invite her consideration—these were the details of what she had called a "penance," beside which the martyrdom of St. Lawrence on his gridiron would have seemed a pleasurable, little episode of a summer day. At first he had tried to avoid her, to keep to himself, and to remain silent in her presence—not from any churlishness of temper, but with an instinct of self-protection mingled with a desire to spare

her the awkwardness of his society. But she had looked at him with grieved eyes as if the change in his manner hurt her. And after that he had gritted his teeth and forced himself, in his own parlance, to "face the music" that she might not be unhappy because he was miserable. She had said that he was strong enough to do this thing that she had asked. But in spite of himself, there were moments when the cold sweat stood upon his brow, so great was the effort with which he controlled himself from seizing her in his arms and crushing her to him with pleading and caresses. So long as she had been willing to let their relationship drift on the tide of the sunny, indolent New Mexican days, patience had been easy. Now, with definite denial of his love, the call to action was fierce and strong.

But if Evelyn had set him a "penance" his own manhood was no less compelling. A month before he might have struggled for his prize; now, something—the wilderness, perhaps—perhaps the touch of that velvet cheek against his in the darkness of the canyon—had changed him. He would not attempt to win her by force. She must come to him freely of her own volition, or not at all. All the passion that a Santos might have put into snatching a bride by fair means or foul, the Easterner must expend in making himself in some small measure fine enough for the woman he loved—in service, in devotion, in unobtrusive guardianship of her happiness and welfare. If he could not win her thus, then bitterly he must lose her, for

by no other means though won, could he keep her, in spirit, as his.

Evelyn belonged to Santos! Over and over the words rang in Winthrop's ears—mocking, tantalizing, despairing! Sometimes he told himself that she could not love the man. The fellow was a scoundrel. At other times he confessed that he had been mistaken—since she loved him, Santos must be nobler than he had appeared to a jealous rival. She, with her woman's sure instinct, had detected a hidden sincerity. The thought clouded the lover's brow with the old distrust. He could not regret the message to the detective. It might at least convince him of Santos' integrity.

Winthrop watched Evelyn. Not a shade of the changing expression of face or voice escaped him when he was with her. If her tone was gay but slightly wearied, he knew it. If her eyes fluttered drowsily after long hours in the open air, he carelessly suggested that all turn in early that night. When he thought she was pale—and he often detected a pallor now beneath the rose of her cheek—he saw to it that someone carried her a glass of water or an extra cushion. But if she had not been keyed to his mood, knowing what had happened between them, she would never have guessed that he watched her, so unobtrusive was his scrutiny and so secret and well concealed his guardianship. As it was, she was acutely conscious of his presence and of his eyes. She in her turn fancied that his face was thinner than it had been, and as the days passed she wondered

sometimes if, after all, she had asked him to do too hard a thing in continuing the journey with her. But no! His success in the trip across the Continent must not be marred. She was cruel in exacting the "penance," only that she might be kind. And he was keeping his promise gloriously; he was strong, as she had believed. She wished—she almost wished—that she could love him in the way girls did when they were ready to marry men, to live and die for them and with them. And Winthrop, had he known, would have been utterly astonished to find that his watchful eyes, his reserve, and the forced laughter with which he tried to hide his gravity and pain, pleaded his cause better than any caresses or tender words could ever have done.

There was one thing that she spared him; she would not ride in the Eastcott automobile, and she so maneuvered that he was never invited into the Deering car.

The sun shone brightly and the air was balmy with the balsamic odors of pine as the travelers entered the mountain domain of the Apaches—a race which, in spite of the restraining influences of the White Man's laws, has lost little of its untamed savagery or of its wild, nomadic instinct. Here the Indian squats in contemptuous refusal of all the gifts of the civilization which has engulfed him, yet master of his lord in fidelity to tradition, in his untamed freedom, and in the simple and unschooled philosophy of Nature.

For miles the path wound through the pines,

growing steeper as it climbed toward the sky line. The plains were now far below, and when the timber line was passed and the plateau stretched a glittering field of snow over the trail, the automobiles might have been completely isolated from the rest of the world, so great was the lonely desolation. The wheels struck unmercifully against sharp lava fragments hidden beneath the snow, and Winthrop and the two chauffeurs took turns in walking ahead to discover their location and size. Shovels were brought into action; the cars backed and forged ahead like snow plows while the human guides continued the irksome task of testing the track with their feet. Then came the welcome timber line again! Between the bordering trees moved the skulking forms of the forest denizens—the bear and the mountain cat—while the “gobble-gobble” of the wild turkey broke the deathly silence. The Red Man’s hunting grounds stretched from horizon to horizon.

Darkness was closing in like a wall as the two cars caught sight of the welcome lights of a ranch. It was too late to get any idea of the prodigal beauty of the setting which their host for the night had chosen for his home on the forest fringe. Guide and scout—white-bearded patriarch and type of the men who made the West—the old ranchman proved a delightful companion who entertained the men of the party with many a stirring tale of Indian warfare.

Many miles beyond the ranch of the settler, lies a picturesque military post or fort, which watches

over an Indian estate of two and a half million acres. With cactus and yucca, agave and greasewood, sagebrush and cedar—a plant life that varies from the semi-tropical to the sub-alpine—with bear and deer roaming upon the mountain slopes, trout in the rivers, and on the banks of the various streams the camps of the Indians—life on the reservation lacked nothing of picturesqueness and interest. Already the travelers had ample opportunity to study the peculiarities of dress, the habits and homes of these warlike bands. Men and women alike were, as a rule, tattooed with dark-blue, geometrical designs in the center of forehead and chin, while often the pattern was continued from the forehead down the nose. The men wore hard, buckskin moccasins, with here and there long uppers reaching to the thighs and sparingly decorated with painted designs and bead work; both sexes appeared fond of necklaces of many-colored beads, and the women wore earrings from which dangled strings of bright beads. Copper, brass, and iron wire bracelets of bead work were also popular, while the young girls decorated their black hair with highly prized ornaments of leather formed like figure eights and set with brass buttons. Though, here and there, a man or woman was to be seen who was the evident production of civilizing influences, most of the Apaches seemed to bear out the reputation of the average dusky citizen of the tribe for shiftlessness and untrustworthiness.

The fort, which lacks the defenses of a walled

stronghold, crowns a small plateau surrounded by deep canyons. The automobiles crept slowly down the cliff road and across an iron bridge to the path that climbs along the side of the opposite bank to the parade ground. While the young lieutenant, who was officer of the day, glanced over Eastcott's letters of introduction and took the ladies gallantly in charge, the men of the party eagerly bought supplies at the long, low building which did duty as canteen, and inspected the horse pens, the troopers, and the polyglot assemblage of bedraggled Apache warriors and squaws who roamed at will about the fort.

It was the youthful lieutenant who interrupted what he felt sure must be the monotony of the journey across Arizona for the ladies by the proposal that the party pass the night at the fort. The station at the river, which was kept by an agent subsidized by the Government to run a ferry across the stream, could not be reached before dark, he explained. There was a general consensus of opinion among the officers that the entire party should defer their departure till the morning. At least the ladies would find the quarters at the fort more comfortable than the meager accommodations at the station or than the inadequate shelter of tents. Eastcott, who suspected that in this land of prodigious mountain terraces, profound canyons, and wide stretches of rugged horizon, the thrall was liable to become a pall when the amenities of society were withdrawn from the isolated watchers in the lonely fastnesses, smiled.

He understood well enough that his wife and her companion were welcome visitors, and he had visions of an impromptu dinner and dance. But the afternoon was already well advanced, and since there was some question as to whether or no there would be sufficient accommodation at the ferry station for so large a party, he decided that the ladies and the Colonel, together with the Colonel's chauffeur and car, should remain behind as hostages to the officers' hospitality, while he and Winthrop made their way to the river. The Colonel, with the ladies, was to follow early the next morning, and both cars would then continue the run to the outskirts of the Apache Reservation.

This programme, while appearing to give immense satisfaction to the military hosts, met with disconcerting disfavor from Colonel Deering.

"It's well enough as an arrangement," confided that gentleman to Mrs. Eastcott as he strolled with her over the parade ground. "But how about our plan for Evelyn and young Hammond? She has seemed to me so quiet and unlike herself for the last few days that I'm beginning to think she's actually in love with him. An evening together by the fire at the forest station now——"

But Mrs. Eastcott shook her head. "It's no use, Colonel. She might as well dance herself tired with the lieutenant. She doesn't love him! She told me so herself!"

"Love the lieutenant?" cried the horrified Col-

onel. "Why, she's only known him half an hour!"

"Oh, the lieutenant!" said Mrs. Eastcott scornfully, as if the officer had been the ground under her feet. "I'm talking of Win, Colonel. She told me this very morning quite impressively that she had definitely made up her mind that she didn't care for him. I've been waiting for a word with you." And Mrs. Eastcott sighed.

"What?" ejaculated her companion. "Not care for him when we have brought her on this trip just to give them every chance to fall in love? Why, it's perfectly preposterous! She can't mean it!"

"Well, frankly, Colonel, I hardly know." Mrs. Eastcott's voice was patiently resigned. "She isn't a usual girl. With most girls I should say that the trip isn't over yet, and her decision is more in the nature of an armistice than a final refusal of his proposal. But, as I said, Evelyn is quite different from most girls. She is more subtle and elusive—like a beautiful, dancing flame, you know."

Colonel Deering shook his head disconsolately. "It's Santos who has ended everything."

"Ended everything? Why, nothing was ever begun," cried Mrs. Eastcott with more spirit. "It's the beginning we have been plotting for, Colonel, isn't it?"

"Very likely, my dear lady, very likely!" he agreed absently.

"When I see two young people as handsome

as Win and Evelyn making such a muddle of their affairs—well, positively, Colonel, it makes me feel ill.” And, indeed, poor Mrs. Eastcott, leaning suddenly against a convenient tree, actually looked quite green with distress.

The Colonel nodded with complete dejection. “Well,” he said, with an effort at politeness, “you’ve accomplished something, Mrs. Eastcott. We’ve no longer any doubt as to their relation to each other, though I confess that I preferred uncertainty to such unpleasant assurance.”

“But they haven’t any relation to each other, Colonel—that’s the trouble!” said the other with whimsical despair. “I’ve talked to her like a mother and a Christian more than once, as you suggested. No—I’ve not been exactly urging her—I could hardly undertake that responsibility—but I’ve been telling her stories about Winthrop to show her what a fine fellow he is, and I’ve been talking to her—incidentally, you know—about the beauty of love.”

“You’ve been very good, my dear Mrs. Eastcott. I appreciate your interest extremely, and so, I know, does Evelyn,” said the Colonel gloomily. “If I thought that her refusal to be interested in your nephew meant that I should continue to keep her with me, I should be more than satisfied with her decision. It seems almost uncanny that a father should be plotting to marry off his only daughter.”

His fellow-conspirator looked sympathetically into his anxious eyes. She felt very sorry for

him—this lonely man who had no wife to advise him about the welfare of his idolized child. “You’ll not feel safe about her till she’s thoroughly interested in some other man than Señor Santos,” she said. “I know exactly how you feel. He isn’t the right husband for her at all, any more than a butte or a mesa would be.”

“I suppose this means he’s crowded out Hammond,” said the Colonel dismally. “I know her so well—I—er—can feel she’s in love with someone.”

Suddenly Mrs. Eastcott tapped his arm mysteriously. “Colonel, I have an idea. When we planned this trip for them, we—made—a—mistake. We’ve made a mistake all along. I’ve made a mistake ever since we left New York.”

He looked at her in puzzled bewilderment.

“We’re the witches in ‘Macbeth’—at least two of them,” she said softly; “but we’ve worked the wrong kind of a charm. We’ve made things too easy for them.”

“Oh,” he said, looking blankly at the waiting automobiles and thinking involuntarily of the roughness of the trails they had traveled. “Too easy?”

“Yes! I see it all now as plain as day. We’ve lassoed him, as you would say here in the West, and put him directly under her hand,” she explained picturesquely. “She’d like him better, perhaps, if we liked him less.”

Colonel Deering regarded the charming

“witch” in the motor bonnet with concern. “But we can’t shoot him nor quarrel with him just to make her love him.”

“Of course not. But we must seem to disapprove of any cordiality between them. I ought to have disapproved from the very moment we left New York. From Kansas City on I ought to have been a perfect dragon of a chaperon. Then by this time they would have loved each other desperately.”

“Hum—m!” said Colonel Deering thoughtfully. “You may be right. We’ve certainly done our best to give them a clear way and fair weather. A few waves in the shape of discouragement and obstacles might have driven them into port, you think?”

“I’m almost positive of it,” she sighed. “Oh! what fine views I missed by pretending to take those interminable naps on the Santa Fé Trail. Mr. Eastcott was positively disgusted with me. He said I was getting old and senile before my time, and nothing I could say would make him believe I was only carrying out a deeply laid scheme.”

“I’m distressed indeed, my dear friend,” began Colonel Deering. “I——”

“Never mind! I’ve rested enough for the next year, and I’ll prove during the remainder of the journey that I’m still in the race for life. Now, Colonel, you understand that you are perfectly delighted that Evelyn doesn’t like Winthrop. *And so am I.* Instead of encouraging their ac-

quaintance we are to do everything we can, apparently, to hinder it."

"Exactly," he answered with more cheer than he had shown fifteen minutes before. "I'm to get out my gun if I find them *tête-à-tête*-ing."

"You won't find them in any such intimacy of conversation, henceforth, my fellow-conspirator. Where is Evelyn, by the way? You don't mean to say that she is over there by the automobile with him at this moment? Colonel, will you break in on that little pleasantry—or shall I?"

"We will both go," said the Colonel with a pathetic note of wistfulness in his voice as he surveyed the two delinquents. "Evelyn, dear," he called, as he walked with Mrs. Eastcott across the parade ground and his daughter advanced to meet him, "Evelyn, you would like to stay at the fort? I mean"—he corrected himself hastily as she drew near—"I hope young Hammond gets under weigh soon, so that we may have a pleasant little visit with the officers. A civilian seems so—so uncouth—among——" The Colonel floundered hopelessly, and Evelyn looked at him, quite frightened by such plain speaking. Then she glanced at Mrs. Eastcott apologetically.

"Indeed, I hope he will not," she said soothingly. "We shall have much more fun at the dance if Winthrop will stay, too."

Mrs. Eastcott nodded brightly. "Win doesn't care much for dances and woman's caprices," she explained. "He is only too delighted to get rid of the feminine portion of the party for a time."

To Evelyn's utter astonishment, her chaperon and her father burst into a laugh.

Later, when Evelyn would have wished Winthrop and his uncle "Good luck" on their journey to the river, Mrs. Eastcott announced carelessly that they had already gone, and Evelyn, if she felt any regret, was obliged to conceal it in conversation with the young lieutenant.

Before Winthrop and Eastcott had left the fort more than a few miles behind, the sun set over the hills and the rugged mountain fastnesses in a blaze of fiery splendor. The noble dignity of the scene, which these lower spurs of the Rockies offered as the shadows fell, awed the occupants of the car into a silence which was scarcely broken during the twenty miles "run" among the mountains and canyons.

At last a light appeared out of the deepening dusk, seemingly not more than a quarter of a mile to the left. The road, however, led on and on into the darkness, and the light disappeared. Then the car began to descend rapidly, and the ripple of water reached the travelers' ears. A ford, deep and forbidding, lay in the darkness directly across the path.

Eastcott and the chauffeur alighted to investigate.

"What do you make of it?" asked Winthrop.

Eastcott played the headlight across the dull surface of the waters gloomily.

"It's the ferry right enough, but there's no

sign of a boat. I'm glad we left the ladies behind."

"No signs of a ferry?" repeated Winthrop blankly.

"No."

"Well, where's the station? The light——"

"That's on the other side, and we must make a crossing by hook or by crook somehow."

"Humph! Looks like cruelty to machinery."

"I don't like the prospect myself. We'll have to charge the river like a buffalo bull—buck her with open throttle, and trust to the God of Autos for the rest."

"And Heaven on the side of the Right," laughed Winthrop. The promise of an exciting adventure gave him a sense of exhilaration he had not known for several days. Already his experience as a disappointed lover had stiffened his fiber as a whiff of the North wind invigorates the desert plains of Egypt.

The car plunged into the river—desperately—valiantly—and with a splash buried its flat prow in the Stygian waters. A hundred feet of hidden boulders—the swish of foam about the radiator—a struggling, fighting progress! Then the violent rocking motion ceased, and the nose of the car pushed itself up the further bank. The machine stopped.

"We're sliding back," cried the chauffeur, as he clapped on the brakes.

It was true. The bank was steep and slippery; the car lost its grip, and slid back into the river.

Again and again it attempted the slope, and again and again it fell into the ford.

"Get into the river and we'll haul her out with block and tackle," said Eastcott.

The chauffeur hesitated, then took the plunge. At the same moment, the hand lantern was dropped, and the man, losing his balance, disappeared in the current. Luckily, he was soon on his feet again, and after a seemingly interminable period of renewed struggle, the car stood safely at last on dry land.

The house forming the station was a primitive adobe structure where the keeper, who with his young wife had been at his post only a few days, found some difficulty in making the travelers comfortable. Eastcott, however, had plenty of food in the larder of the automobile, and the camp outfit furnished bedding. The station produced the fire and the beds.

It was a strange experience to these denizens of the city to eat and smoke beside a family hearth where no neighborly gossip had ever penetrated, and where the only conversation was of the Indians and of the days when men sold themselves dearly to the "Red Devils" from behind stock or wagon corral. Indian renegades, robbers, wanderers, cattle thieves, and rustlers, murderers—all those types which form the dregs of humanity in the unschooled, primitive West—passed in grotesque procession through the tales of the keeper as he made his guests welcome in the way he knew,

Winthrop shuddered with sympathy for the woman who sat steeled to the hardships of her lot and listened to the grewsome, blood-curdling stories. In her humble way she seemed to him a heroine; his pity and admiration went out to her. She knew her dangers here in the wild—dangers of which the whole history of American pioneering had provided her with ample warning. But she dared to make a home for her husband and to sacrifice all that was due her womanhood to answer the call of Love. Impulsively, Winthrop thanked the Fates which had spared his aunt and Evelyn the primitive hospitality of that solitary hut-like dwelling, where, for all that was evident to the contrary, the man and woman, an assistant, and the travelers themselves might be the sole survivors of a civilization that could never be regained. The scene, which struck him with an unexpected sordidness now that he saw it outside the pages of a book and free from the picturesque exaggerations of the stage, filled him with an indescribable repugnance. For the first time since he left New York he heard the voice of the City calling to him.

As if to lend a touch of realism to the keeper's tales, the wind had risen to the force of a gale, and the Furies without whistled and howled as they beat themselves against the flimsily built adobe structure. The woman brought out a Winchester rifle, and the man launched forth upon a fresh tale. Winthrop's mind wandered to an-

other scene in the mountains nearby, where a young and beautiful woman was without doubt the center of an admiring crowd of young officers smitten with the incipient stages of calf-love. He hoped whimsically that his aunt was doing duty as duenna in keeping them at arm's length from her charge. Then he heard the woman by the hearth filling in, as a woman will, the gaps left in man's half-told tale. Yes, this was the very rifle which the Apache had used only a few days previously to kill his squaw while he was crazed with "fire-water." From the gruesome story of the murdered squaw, the keeper turned to the recital of a recent crime at the next forage station seventeen miles further west, where two discharged soldiers had murdered two citizens from Phoenix who had arrived there for a week's hunting.

As the night wore on, the wind gradually dropped, until its roar sank to a dirge-like wail. The fire had begun to flicker spasmodically before the host and hostess bade the travelers good-night, and Winthrop stretched himself wearily on his hard bed. His uncle had gone to take a final look at the car. Outside a dog set up a melancholy howling.

"Only wants a few Apaches on the warpath, eh, Win?" said Eastcott, coming in at last with the chauffeur.

"So I was thinking," said Winthrop drowsily.

"Well, the picture is complete."

Winthrop raised himself on his elbow. "Honest Injun?"

"Dishonest Injuns, more likely," laughed Eastcott. "Young bucks looking for any kind of trouble from a scalp to a pony. The 'handy man' outside has been regaling the chauffeur for an hour with the whole business. Told him to say nothing to us. The keeper didn't want to scare us."

"Got us into training by those stories instead, I suppose." Winthrop's thoughts went back to the woman who faced danger as a woman of the East might have faced some minor detail of domestic demand and supply. "Is there any possibility of attack?"

"Oh, no! The man says the bucks put on war paint a week ago. They broke bounds but didn't do any mischief and Uncle Sam drove them back to the reservation camps. He thinks they're out again."

Eastcott lay down with the indifference of the pioneer, and Winthrop fell asleep.

When the travelers awoke some hours later, daylight was streaming through the diminutive windows and a ray of November sunshine was lying across the rough floor. Without, voices were speaking excitedly.

The three men sat up. Had anything happened?

The voices became a chorus. There was a sound of hurrying feet—a low call. Then a bullet sped through the window and buried itself in the further wall.

CHAPTER XXIV

“ THE Devil! ” exclaimed Eastcott, as he and his companions sprang to their feet. At the same moment the inner door opened and the keeper stood before them.

“ The Red Devils, you mean, sir, ” he corrected laconically.

The voice of the woman was now heard calling to the dogs, which had set up a loud baying. The man disappeared, and Eastcott, Winthrop, and the chauffeur hastily scrambled into their clothes. Presently the door opened again and the host returned, trailing a rifle and apparently in the best of spirits.

“ No need to fall over one another in yer hurry, ” he drawled. “ There ain’t no danger—just young bucks out on a Fourth-o’-July spree; that’s all. ”

“ Spree! ” exclaimed Winthrop. “ Look at that! ” And he pointed to the bullet imbedded in the further wall.

The keeper regarded it with complacency. “ That bullet’s just a kind o’ visitin’ card. Lets us know they’re here. Guess we’ll know how to entertain ’em, sure! ”

The man’s nonchalance was infectious. Eastcott, who had known the West when Indian raids

were serious, although even then infrequent, affairs, had already adjusted himself to the keeper's view of the situation.

"Rattling good 'copy,' Win, you know! This is what most people think a Transcontinental trip means."

"'Copy!'" said Winthrop, again echoing the salient word. "'Copy!' I should think this kind of thing would do plenty of harm to Transcontinental motoring if it got into Eastern papers."

"Not a bit of it," declared Eastcott cheerfully. "Lots of people come West just in the hope of being held up on the train."

Winthrop was standing at the small, uncurtained window. The automobile had arrived in the darkness, and now in the morning sunshine he caught his first glimpse of the surroundings. The shabby house was situated at the foot of a ravine, which by some process of erosion had been cut off sheer in its descent to the river, leaving a flat, level floor of adobe. High above the station was a transverse ridge, from which vantage point an enemy could completely command the situation. On the slopes the falling talus had left bare, fortress-like rocks. Dwarf cedars spread their bushy tops in long, straggling lines on all sides, while some, bolder than the rest, had ventured as far as the house itself, as if to satisfy a very natural curiosity about the human invaders of the wilderness. Across the yard, in front of a row of outhouses, waddling ducks and peaceful fowls were busy with their

matutinal meal. Winthrop could see the tracks made by the automobile the night before, and under an open shed-roof, supported by some crazy-looking uprights, the car itself was plainly visible. In the distance was a rolling line of dark, frowning mountains, lost amid which lay the Fort.

Suddenly, on the ridge above, appeared several fantastic figures. They were dancing about in the most approved Indian fashion, and Winthrop could distinctly see that they were wearing the Indian war-dress of his childhood's story-books. They carried bows and arrows, but they seemed to be amusing themselves with some kind of horse-play rather than giving any further attention to the house below.

The keeper's voice sounded over Winthrop's shoulder: "What did I tell yer! See them bow and arrows? Didn't I figger it out that they're just a pack o' schoolboys out on the tear? Indians on the warpath these days don't put much store on them antiques. They'd rather trust to a gun, like the white man. Those young cubs up there are too afraid of Uncle Sam to start a real row."

"What about the bullet, then?" asked Winthrop, still somewhat skeptical.

The man laughed. "You've sure got me there! It ain't natural, anyway." He peered out curiously for some moments. "Well, there's one chap up there with a gun—in store clothes, too. There! He's gone behind the rocks." He picked up his gun and opened the door into the yard cautiously. "Guess we'll send them *our* card, with compli-

ments, just to show 'em we're home!" He laughed good-naturedly and took careful aim. Almost simultaneously with the report a shower of pebbles scattered about the Indians' feet, as if kicked up by a pony's hoofs.

The Indians stopped their dancing in surprise. The watchers at the door saw two of the men swiftly draw their bows. There was a squawk and a cackle and a flutter in the yard, and two pullets lay prone on the ground. An arrow had found its billet in each. A prolonged whoop and a loud laugh went up from the Indians at the success of their return sally.

"There's your lunch, gentlemen!" chuckled the keeper.

"Thanks," said Eastcott, rather lugubriously. "Fricassee's all right; but I hope the fellows won't make pincushions of my tires." He looked out at the automobile under the shed. "We're in a tight corner if anything happens to the car."

"They'll be scared to death of that devil-wagon, Boss." The man spoke reassuringly. "It's like a photo-machine to the varmint. I seen a man once draw a bead with a snapbox on a lot o' Redskins an' they fled permiscuous over the plains."

"Breakfast's ready," announced the matter-of-fact voice of the keeper's wife from the open door of the kitchen.

"Pile in, gentlemen!" The host noticed that Eastcott hesitated. "My man'll keep an eye on the 'gas-wagon.'"

In the kitchen the woman was taking a pan of hot "biscuit" out of the oven. A large tin pail of milk and a plate of the inevitable fried meat stood on the bare table. Muddy coffee steamed from thick earthen mugs without handles and minus saucers. Dingy knives, forks, and spoons were sticking from a glass preserve-jar as a centerpiece. Several battered tin plates, upside down, indicated the guests' seats, which comprised some rickety chairs supplemented by a packing-box on end. In a corner of the room a rubber hose, attached to a small standard, did duty as a convenient water supply. As her husband and the visitors took their places, the woman sat down unconcernedly by the stove to peel potatoes. Winthrop, thinking of the blood-curdling stories of the night before, was struck by the anticlimax of this serio-comic, twentieth-century Indian raid.

Suddenly he pulled out his watch. The hour was seven. "By Jove, we shall have Colonel Deering's car over here before long!" he exclaimed, in consternation.

Eastcott started. "The ladies mustn't see those Indian blatherskites! Nell would be frightened out of her wits. We must get over to the Fort before they start."

"They won't leave before nine," said Winthrop gravely, thinking of Evelyn. "And it's twenty miles away. That gives us time to clear out these fellows and get on the road."

"Would the military be likely to know about this?" Eastcott turned to the keeper.

“Ain’t likely,” answered the man flatly. “An’ they wouldn’t take it serious if they did. They’ve left us to shift for ourselves before. Only, if we happen to kill an Indian, there’s likely to be a heap o’ trouble. If a Redskin kills a white man—that’s another thing! You’ve got to catch your man.” He looked out of the doorway and exchanged a few words with his helper before returning to the table. “I reckon what’s drawn them is just that auto-mo-bile. They spotted the tracks an’ didn’t know what to make of the jigger.”

“They’ll have a bad reception if anybody attempts to investigate too closely,” said Eastcott grimly.

“Oh, shucks! Jim says there ain’t a Redskin in sight now. They’ve had all they can stomach, you bet! They’ve made off for the reservation before there’s any trouble.”

Nevertheless, as Eastcott and the chauffeur were getting the car ready for the journey to the Fort, Winthrop took advantage of the half-hour’s delay to do some reconnoitering on his own account. He prowled around the outskirts of the clearing and scanned the hillsides carefully. So far as he could see, the coast was clear. Not an Indian was anywhere about.

At last the chauffeur cranked the engines; there was a familiar roar and whirl, and the car swung into the tracks of the night before. Winthrop sprang into the tonneau as his uncle took the seat by the driver. There was a rifle, supplied for

precaution's sake by the keeper, and Eastcott had his' own revolver.

"But a popgun would do for all the trouble you'll have," remarked the host confidently. "You won't see nothin' worse than a coyote."

The car set out cautiously towards the river. The vigorous mountain air and the odor of the forest filled Winthrop with a sense of exhilaration. He heard the swishing rush of the river. He saw the ford, the shining waters, the rough banks, the trees, and tangle of bared branches and underwood. He was almost sorry that an adventure, which would have delighted his school-days, had ended so tamely. Fresh wheel-marks were to be seen on the muddy banks, and the traces of the desperate struggle at the crossing on the night before were plainly evident. The road beyond the ford stretched away toward the Fort, winding in and out into the blueness of the hills, a gray ribbon distinct amid the rocks and scanty, scrubby trees. So far as the eye could reach, there was no sign of the Indians.

"Take the ford leisurely," instructed Eastcott. "We don't want to get stuck in mid-stream."

The automobile reached the edge of the bank and, with just sufficient hesitation to allow of a rapid survey of the river-channel, plowed into the stream. The water covered the occupants with a shower of foam and spindrift, and for a moment all three lost the sense of direction in the violent

rocking as the wheels bumped along the uneven bed. Then there was a perceptible cant of the tonneau, a change of horizon level, and the car shot up the opposite bank like a deer.

“She’s hit it finely!” shouted Eastcott, with enthusiasm. “Let her out now! Give her her head!”

The chauffeur wanted no second bidding. The automobile flew over the open road and up an incline, the “purring” of the engines drowned in a deafening fusillade from the exhaust. In the wake was a dense cloud of dust and smoke. The wind of the night before had swept the heavens sweet and clear, and in the morning sunshine distant objects stood out with photographic sharpness. Range after range of mountains, hidden by the darkness of the previous night, now appeared in view, the purple and blue of the furthest elevations fading away into a pale mist. The road wound in and out at varying levels, and at last curved away from the river in a wide sweep.

The car was making fast time when a wild hallo rang out, seemingly ahead on the track. It was the unmistakable Indian war whoop.

The chauffeur turned a bewildered face to Eastcott, as he changed speeds at the foot of a downgrade. “Gee! There they are again. We’re trapped for fair!”

There was a confusing flare of color that wheeled out in a wide semicircle across the road; then a cloud of dust. Another flare of color appeared above on the slope near the skyline. From

the shoulder of a hill a narrow trail ran down to the main road, where a huge boulder of rock hid the view beyond. The car moved slowly along.

“ Don't be a fool, man! ” cried Eastcott impatiently. “ Let her out! They haven't fired. They want some sport with the automobile. And, by George, they're getting it! ”

For, as the chauffeur opened up the muffler, the horses of the Indians reared and wheeled in affright at the belching, roaring monster in their path. In a flash one was rolling with its rider in the dust, while another leaped over the prostrate forms, only to crash to earth with a heavy thud. The others were scattering in all directions up the slopes, swerving and pirouetting and leaping into the air with maddened snorts, while their riders made frenzied efforts to restrain them. A spatter of small stones rained on the path from the weathered ledges. A moment more and not an Indian was left on the roadway.

Winthrop rose triumphantly in the car and tried to cheer. But his body lurched, hung and swayed, and he fell ignominiously back into his seat as the automobile shot over the crest of a hill and down into the sunny blue of the valley below. He laughed aloud, and his uncle and the chauffeur took up the laugh gayly, while the automobile dashed along in the pride of conscious power.

The Transcontinentalists had had time to see that the keeper had been correct in his judgment. The Indians were all young men, obviously play-

ing at the old-time game of the warpath. One, who seemed to be the leader, was a striking figure; every line and muscle indicated unusual will-power, cunning, and cruelty. He and his companions were decked out in true warrior fashion. A generous tallow shampoo had mollified their shocks of hair, round which were bound broad orange-yellow bandannas. Ponderous silver circlets dangled from the generous slits in their ears. Long strings of beads, interspersed with magic berries, roots, and bits of turquoise, placed them in the height of martial fashion. Moccasins reached to their knees and were folded twice over from the top, giving the effect of armored greaves and providing excellent protection against the omnipresent thorns of the Arizona wild. Apparently, complexions had been carefully studied, and here the exigencies of fashion had received due consideration. The dust of a blue micaceous stone glittered banefully upon each bold face, while from ear to ear had been drawn an inch-wide band of blood. The remainder had been bedaubed with a coating of green copper-ore, while, as if to supply an effective finishing touch, the prominent noses had received trans-nasal stripes of vivid vermilion. The effort was ghastly in the extreme, and more bloodthirsty-looking land-pirates could scarcely be conceived.

But the adventure was not yet over. A solitary Indian had gained the crest of a slope of shale and was forcing his pony again madly in the direction of the car. There was a cloud of sand, the earth

jerked loose under the hoofs, and horse and rider dashed forward in a tangled mass into the long, rank grass. The white men laughed again, louder than before. An answering whoop of satisfaction at their comrade's ignominious downfall came from the other Indians.

A sudden calm followed. The chauffeur slackened the speed of the car. The white men, looking back, saw that objects, plainly discernible as Indians, were moving rapidly in their direction.

"They're spoiling for a race, just like the dogs that run after the car," said Eastcott. "Let's give them a sporting chance."

The Indians disappeared in a dip of the road, then flashed into sight again in a whirl of dust which sprinkled the sunshine with a dull spray. Above, in the cloudless blue sky, an eagle soared and wheeled as though Jupiter had sent his symbol to umpire this match of the Old against the New.

The Indians, whooping with glee, were almost abreast of the automobile when the chauffeur put on a spurt and the car dashed impetuously forward. The men dug their moccasined heels into their ponies' flanks. The hoofs pounded close to the machine, and, for a few exciting moments, neither party seemed to gain upon the other.

"Look out for the chuck-holes, man!" cried Eastcott to the driver, while Winthrop clung desperately with hands and feet to his seat.

The road now began to double on its tracks, leaving a broad, intervening slope impossible to

the car, but offering a fine surface to the riders if they chose to take it. The Indians were quick to grasp the situation, and made a desperate effort to negotiate the "cut-off" which would land them again in front of the automobile. Bending over their horses, they dived down the crest into the road. But in their daring they had overshot the mark. There was a shower of dust and a slither of horseflesh as the huddled animals pitched forward with sprawling hoofs that flung out wildly for a grip of the loose ground; then there was a harsh grating of the gears, a second's pause in full flight, a violent swerve. A path opened in the roadway. The car made a sinuous curve and sped away. The race was won. Winthrop raised his University yell.

The next three miles were covered without incident. The Indians had evidently given up the chase and had disappeared.

As Winthrop watched the road trailing its way into the hills, his thoughts went back again to the stories which had whiled away the post-prandial hours of the night before—stories which hugged the horrors of danger from sordid greed, from frenzied depravities of frontier settlements, from drunken orgies and unschooled passions, of narrow escapes from animals of the wild and from the animal-men who have settled the plains. He recalled the keeper's tale of the rising of the Apaches, under the notorious Geronimo, amid those very mountains. Geronimo, with a handful of followers and encumbered by women and chil-

dren, had defied the entire nation of white men for years, had marched with swiftness and covered distances which no army in the world's history had ever approximated, and had shown such marvelous courage, endurance, and generalship that the Indians still regarded him as a demigod. Such stories made the incidents of the morning seem doubly tame, and emphasized unmistakably the complete metamorphosis which civilizing institutions had wrought. The physical aspect of the Apaches' haunts alone remained unchanged.

While these reflections occupied his attention, Winthrop suddenly became aware that the car had stopped. The chauffeur got down and opened the bonnet. Steam was pouring from the radiator-cap.

"Thought so!" said the man. "About a thimbleful of water left. She's almost burned up her bearings."

"Didn't you fill her up before we left the station?" cried Eastcott, in dismay.

"No!" answered the man doggedly. "Them Indians made me clean forget."

Eastcott examined the silent engines.

"Can't budge her! She's stalled," explained the chauffeur. "Feed's choked!"

"And there's a flat tire," commented Winthrop, from the rear.

Eastcott's face expressed an eloquent disgust. "That's what we get for racing with those young bucks—running her up the grades on 'high'! We've no time to lose, either!" He stripped off

his coat. "We don't want the ladies along here till we're certain the coast is clear. Those fellows were all right with us; but things might be different if women were around. Suppose you get some water, Win, while we fix up the machine. That'll save time."

Winthrop picked up the collapsible bucket and the canteen. "All right! I saw a spring a little way back." And he started down the road. In a few moments the cedar-brush hid him from view.

Eastcott set to work on the engines while the man attacked the problem of the tire. The chauffeur's omission, although annoying, was excusable under the circumstances. Nevertheless, Eastcott, seeing the bad condition of the car, thought regretfully of McNulty. Could it be possible that the fellow was really guilty of such a horrible crime as murder? Win's detective was annoyingly slow with the clues. Eastcott glanced down at the plodding substitute. McNulty would have had the tire replaced in half the time.

Fifteen minutes later the man was still working at the wheel. Eastcott closed the bonnet with a bang. Even Winthrop was none too speedy a helper. What on earth could he be doing at the spring all this time? Perhaps water was further than any of them had realized.

Eastcott walked impatiently a short distance down the road. Winthrop was nowhere visible. Eastcott walked on, with increasing annoyance. Where was the boy? He must have had to go

a very long distance, or—had something happened?

Eastcott quickened his steps, as he thought of the Indians. He had walked fully half a mile before he saw the opening among the cedars which led down to the spring. He shouted his nephew's name. There was no reply.

Thoroughly alarmed now, he looked hastily around him and then started on a run to the little stream, pushing his way through the clumps of bushes.

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“Win! Win!” Eastcott bent over the prostrate form. His voice was hoarse with anxiety.

Winthrop lay on the ground beside the spring. His left arm was limp and bleeding. He sat up with a tremendous effort, dizzy and ashy-pale. There was a hot, biting pain in his arm.

“Give me a shoulder, somebody,” he said faintly, clutching at his uncle's arm. “I'll walk.”

“Good God, boy!” cried Eastcott. “What has happened? Don't move. I'll fetch the car. Did those fellows come back and get you?”

Winthrop put his hand to his forehead. His face cleared.

“Yes,” he said slowly. “Yes; the—the—the enemy winged me.”

“The keeper *said* one of them had a gun! Damn the Red Devils!” remarked Eastcott, with force.

CHAPTER XXV

THE automobiles stood in front of a small Mexican ranch-house, ready for the mountain ride to Phoenix. Colonel Deering and the two ladies were grouped in consternation about Winthrop.

“You were shot, you say? And your uncle brought you along here, and took the surgeon over every day from the Fort? Humph! Well, I’m willing to admit I’m an old fool not to have got wind of what was going on!” And Colonel Deering’s voice betokened unmistakable disgust with his own powers of observation.

Mrs. Eastcott clasped her hands around the arm that hung, uninjured, at her nephew’s side. “Oh, Winthrop!” she moaned. “And I was not here to take care of you! And John and the officers only told us it was unsafe to start for several days! I wondered why you never came to see us! Those bloodthirsty Apaches! I always knew they would scalp some of us!”

Winthrop laughed. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Aunt Nell, if you’ll stop crying over nothing. I’ll have a relapse at the first convenient opportunity and you shall bathe my head and give me chopped ice every three minutes. I’ll have to be a lot more sick than I’ve been yet, however. It’s only

a scratch. We might have gone on the next day, if Uncle John hadn't been so overcautious."

"Overcautious!" groaned his aunt. "I don't believe you ought to start even to-day. I am sure you ought to go straight to the Fort and lie in bed for a long time yet."

"Nonsense," said Winthrop kindly, and looked at Evelyn.

Beyond her first exclamation of surprise and dismay, when she saw the wounded arm, the girl had said nothing. But her sensitive face expressed both concern and anxiety, though her eyes did not meet Winthrop's. She was horrified at what had happened, and her heart quailed at the thought of the worse fate the young man had escaped. While she had been at the Fort, struggling to throw off a depression that clouded her enjoyment of the impromptu military festivities and of the attentions of the admiring officers, he had been confined to this wretched little house, halfway between Fort and station, among strangers, lonely and suffering. She did not know that Winthrop had longed for her presence with an indescribable pain at his heart, beside which the sting in his arm had been nothing. She guessed now that he had bound his uncle to silence to spare her alarm.

It was Eastcott who relieved Winthrop's embarrassment at last and stowed the passengers away into their accustomed places in the automobiles. Just as Evelyn put her foot on the running-

board of her father's car, she turned and held out her hand to Winthrop.

"I—I am so sorry," she said, lifting her eyes to his with gentle sympathy.

"Come! Come, Evelyn," said the Colonel brusquely. "No more time for conversation, my dear." And he forced her diplomatically into the car. Winthrop seated himself beside Mrs. Eastcott, and Evelyn sighed softly.

Towering cliffs topped yawning abysses, which might have swallowed up the automobiles in their dizzy depths without leaving a trace of their greed to tell the tale of disaster. Everywhere on the rocks there was a riotous display of color, and frequently, where the landscape widened, there were distant glimpses of the parched and dun-colored desert that lay basking in the sun like a monster creature that slept and waited for its prey. The fact that the party was yet in the zone of the Indians added to the sense of danger and dread which the scenery and Winthrop's wound inspired in the girl. Though there was small likelihood that the Redskins were anywhere in the present vicinity, the men of the party kept a sharp lookout for trouble and the revolvers were ready for immediate use. Nothing, however, beyond the usual incidents of the trail, occurred.

And now, in the gray of the wilderness, there were to be seen huge monoliths of green and blue sandstone, cathedral spires, blood-red in the sun, and long, carved columns of ivory white and coral pink. Patches of pale sagebrush or glossy, green

greasewood crept to the feet of the monoliths, and giant cacti, with vivid green trunks, vied with the slender spires in climbing to reach the sun. Close at hand, near the trail, grew other cacti, some yellow and white and flowerlike, some mingling their strange reds and greens with the prickly pear and the Yucca plant, so universal throughout Arizona.

But, though the scenery made an eloquent appeal to Evelyn's love of the wildly beautiful and romantic, she could not shake off that depression and sense of foreboding which had oppressed her for several days. Santos' continued silence hung like a cloud over her spirits. Resist it as she would, the temptation to associate this silence with the news of the murder of a Mexican at Santa Fé was too strong for her. Was it possible that Santos was the Mexican victim of foul play? She dared pursue the terrible thought no further. But she longed inexpressibly for the comfort of her father's sympathy and counsel. If only she could shake off this heaviness of spirit so unusual to her, this dread that put her out of touch with the wild, romantic country where they journeyed!

That night, at a thriving town in the rich copper-mining section of Arizona, Evelyn was surprised to hear Mr. Eastcott say to her father: "Your business at Los Angeles too pressing to allow of a little loitering? I'm planning to make a short run to Roosevelt Dam to-morrow afternoon and to stop in the town to-morrow night."

The Colonel considered gravely. "Well," he

said, "I don't know." He glanced surreptitiously at his daughter. "The truth is, I've been thinking perhaps we'd better go on by train, Evelyn and I. I'm rather anxious to get to Los Angeles in a hurry, after all. That irrigation business ought to be settled at once. I believe I'll look up the trains to-night."

"Too bad!" said Eastcott heartily. "Sorry to lose you—and the advertising effect of your voluble steed!"

"Of course we're sorry!" added Mrs. Eastcott lightly. "But I suppose business is always the first thing to be considered. I shall miss Evelyn. Shall we see you both, perhaps, when we arrive in Los Angeles?"

"I'm afraid not," said Colonel Deering nonchalantly. "We shall be back at the ranch by that time, I think. But year after next I may go East for a little trip—take Evelyn, perhaps. We'll look you up then, if we may, and renew a very pleasant acquaintance."

"We shall be delighted to see you," said Mrs. Eastcott, and the corners of her mouth twitched. "And we're more than sorry to part with you so soon."

"Thanks! Regret not seeing Hammond through to a good arm again. But no doubt, if blood-poisoning or anything equally delightful sets in, somebody will drop us a line." And the Colonel laughed and nodded at Mrs. Eastcott as if he had made a capital and very humorous joke.

"We'll send you a notice of the funeral," said

Winthrop gayly. But his laugh sounded forced and hollow.

Evelyn did not lift her eyes. She was totally unprepared for her father's sudden change of plan. The journey was over? She would see neither the Eastcotts nor Winthrop again? She was not ready to say good-by; she was genuinely attached to Mrs. Eastcott; she wanted to know what had become of McNulty; she wanted to witness the official welcome of the Transcontinentalists at the end of their tour; she wanted to say to Winthrop many things that it all at once seemed to her must be said before they could part. At Los Angeles, farewell would have been easy. But now——! She shivered at the lightness with which her father alluded to the wounded arm and suggested possible blood poisoning. He seemed to her suddenly cruel and heartless, and she understood him no more than she did Mrs. Eastcott, who so readily accepted the unexpected separation. It was a strange Fate, Evelyn told herself dully, that decreed that, after a girl had refused to care for a man in precisely the way in which he desired, he must sink off her horizon. Why could not Winthrop be to her nothing more than he was, and yet why could she not meet him frequently, and why could she not help him to a great career? Men were difficult persons; they must have all or nothing of a woman. And now her father was planning to go on by train tomorrow—to-morrow, when the wounded arm was not yet well! She must let Winthrop return to

the East without saying to him all she had forgotten to say on the veranda at the ranch. His laugh grated on her ears. Did he not regret that they were to be parted so soon—parted forever?

“It’s almost too bad for you to miss the wonderful new Roosevelt Dam,” Eastcott was saying unsuspiciously.

“Yes,” answered the Colonel regretfully. “I suppose it’s really quite the show thing around here and well worth a visit. I’d like to have had Evelyn see it.”

“Couldn’t you manage to put off Los Angeles for another day or two?” suggested Eastcott.

“Hum-m-m!” Colonel Deering rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “Evelyn, you’re not particularly anxious about the Dam, are you? You wouldn’t be disappointed if you missed it, would you?”

Evelyn looked at her father gravely, with gentle, serious, wistful eyes. “Yes, Daddy,” she said bravely. “I think I should be disappointed.”

“Hum-m-m!” said the Colonel again, thinking how much she looked like her mother. “Well, I’ll see what can be done. Perhaps another day in the automobile—— I’ll see!”

The journey next day, through the mountains to the town of Roosevelt, was in the nature of a reprieve to Evelyn.

“It is the last time we shall journey together!” Mrs. Eastcott had murmured the words sadly, with a little secret smile in the direction of the Colonel, as she stepped into her car, and Evelyn

had acquiesced with outward composure and not too much apparent regret.

Yet, as the automobiles rolled over the splendid government road, the words haunted the girl insistently. Up and down, in and out among the mountains, wound the highway; and in and out through her brain twisted the light, significant sentence. "The last time" they would all look together at those weirdly-grand slopes devoid of vegetation except for the giant cacti growing straight towards Heaven like natural telephone poles! "The last time" they would all climb a ridge to be greeted with a magnificent view of gorgeously colored cliffs flanking a wide and level valley! "The last time"——

"You are tired, dear?" asked Colonel Deering. "You have hardly seemed yourself for the last few days."

"Tired? Of course not, Daddy. I am just impressed by the wonder of Arizona, that is all," said Evelyn, rallying to something of her old brightness.

"Good! I was half afraid you didn't like it."

"I don't think I do, as well as New Mexico. It is glorious, but too barbaric. The colors are too strong for me. There are no opal mists over the mesas; there is no softness. Here, everything, even the desert, is brilliant, but hard—hard." She spoke lightly, but in her voice there was a note of unrest, as if the vividness of Arizona had wrought from the depression against which she struggled some inward nervousness and excitement.

At Roosevelt, a bare, little, wooden town, sprawling amid the rocks and sagebrush at the foot of the mountains, the two automobiles drew up with a flourish before the local "hotel"—a general store, with a few rooms on the second floor for the accommodation of chance travelers!

When the ladies had been established in their crude quarters, Eastcott and Colonel Deering returned to the car.

"Look here, Win, you let that stuff alone," said Eastcott, as Winthrop with one hand aided the chauffeur to unload rugs and suitcases.

Winthrop laughed a little impatiently. "You're as bad as Aunt Nell for molly-coddling! She's always——"

His protest was interrupted by the sound of prancing feet and his uncle's exclamation, "Shut off the engines, Smith, and let that horse pass."

Turning quickly, Winthrop caught sight of a whirling, plunging horse and its rider—a flash of black mounted by a flash of scarlet. Behind, and advancing along the main street, were other horses and other men in rough Western attire.

"The sheriff and his posse," commented Eastcott, accustomed to Western ways. "Judging from their appearance, they have been on a long raid."

The Western judiciary "outfit," dismounting before the hotel, scanned the automobile with curiosity.

"Any luck?" asked Eastcott of the sheriff.

"Ya-ap! Bagged a few Indians on the Reser-

vation. They've been risin' on their hind legs an' makin' trouble."

"Humph!" remarked Eastcott, picking up a suitcase.

"White man with 'em," added the sheriff. "You been travelin' out that way?"

Eastcott lingered to repeat the story of his own experience with the Indians. When he had finished, the sheriff eyed the party keenly.

"Didn't see anything of the white man, did you? We're wantin' that feller badly."

"No!" said Eastcott.

The sheriff cut a plug of chewing tobacco. "Well, we've got to land him before he quits Arizona, anyway. Big reward on him! Murder in Santa Fé."

"A murder in Santa Fé!" repeated Winthrop, speaking for the first time. He was thinking of the message received from the detective of the Capital. His head swam with confused excitement.

"Yap!" said the sheriff easily. "Greaser named Villara."

"Good Heavens!" cried Colonel Deering. The others stared at the sheriff in sudden horror. "Villara? Murdered? Why, I know him! He was on my ranch only a week ago."

"That so?" remarked the sheriff, as if the murder of an acquaintance were an every-day affair. "Found dead in the Apache Canyon—shot through the head. Greasers' quarrel."

Colonel Deering, who had sunk down, limp with

dismay, on the running-board of the car, mopped his face with his handkerchief. "They're a hot-headed lot," he muttered.

But Eastcott repeated the sheriff's words anxiously. "The Apache Canyon? The murderer's name wasn't—er—McNulty, was it?"

"No," said the sheriff, chewing his quid of tobacco contentedly. "They're both Greasers. Santos—Emilio Santos—that's the feller we're after. Haven't seen him anywheres along, have you?"

CHAPTER XXVI

THERE was no doubt about the accuracy of the sheriff's news. Villara had been found dead in the Apache Canyon. Another Mexican had turned State's Evidence and confessed that he had witnessed the shooting, fastening the crime on Emilio Santos, and giving conclusive proof of the truth of the allegation. Santos had disappeared from the city, but word had been received that he was tracking west. He was presumably making an effort to escape into Arizona and thence into Mexico. The authorities were determined to intercept him.

Colonel Deering listened to the story with incredulous horror. He absolutely refused at first to believe the sheriff's charge. He had known Santos well—his antecedents—his business dealings—the details of his ranch-life. Could he, Colonel Deering, be so deceived in human nature as to entertain in his own home a man who harbored murder in his heart? Could his daughter—— Good Heavens, his daughter was a friend of this man! Of course, Santos was not a criminal. To be sure, there had been a little breeze between Villara and his countryman at dinner a few nights before, but no one had taken it seriously. Colonel Deering questioned the “arm of

the law " minutely, endeavoring to get every iota of information the official brain contained. But the extreme paucity of the sheriff's knowledge was eloquently expressed in the inquirer's disappointed face.

As his mind, however, became more accustomed to the horror of the news, and as he found that Eastcott and Winthrop accepted the meager, circumstantial evidence as conclusive, the conviction forced itself slowly upon Colonel Deering that, after all, perhaps, Santos was capable of such a deed. The Mexican was undoubtedly hot-tempered. His ancestors had often been mixed up in border raids and Mexican feuds; their vast possessions had more than once been held together only by the argument of the bullet. Villara and Santos had openly quarreled a few nights before, and there was unmistakably a certain enmity between them. The murdered man had been found in the Apache Canyon. Was it possible that the two had any affiliation with the political societies known to hold meetings there? Why had Santos, if that were the truth, never mentioned the fact? Could it be that he had been too easily accepted as a friend and introduced to Evelyn? Had he completely hoodwinked a father who had nothing so much at heart as a daughter's welfare?

The incredulity of the Colonel changed to boiling anger. He had been deceived. His Evelyn had been deceived. He had deceived his friends by introducing to them a criminal character. What a piece of luck that the fellow had been

found out! Evelyn, supposing she were in love with Santos, might have actually been married to a murderer! As he thought of possible contingencies and congratulated himself upon the narrow escape, the Colonel boiled anew. Evelyn would be as thankful as he that Santos' true character had been revealed in this timely fashion. Any love which she had treasured for the Mexican would now be turned into repulsion. After all, this horror, like an ill wind, had blown some good. Santos was removed for ever from Evelyn's horizon.

Winthrop stood by and watched the change in the Colonel's emotion. Though astonished enough himself, he was not taken so completely by surprise as was Evelyn's father. He had his own reasons for believing that Santos was quite capable of the imputed crime. The lover, however, was less occupied now with his rival's wrongdoing than with its immediate effect upon Evelyn.

Winthrop had said to himself that he understood Evelyn. But even understanding implies a separateness of identity, and in the hours that followed the sheriff's story, it seemed to him that he became one with the girl he loved. So intense was his sympathy for her, so utterly did he lose himself in her suffering, that for the time he was scarcely conscious of any life apart from Evelyn's—Evelyn's, which he believed was pledged to Santos and whose faith was suddenly dashed into the abyss of disillusionment and shattered into countless fragments!

From the moment when Colonel Deering, recovered from the shock of the revelation and fuming with righteous indignation, marched upstairs to repeat the story to his daughter, the girl experienced no emotion that Winthrop did not share—the sick horror at the murder of Villara—the incredulity—the ultimate realization that Santos was a lawless, hunted outcast in the Wilderness.

Though he was aware that Mrs. Eastcott discussed excitedly with Evelyn the sheriff's surprising disclosures, he felt confident that the girl revealed to no one the true state of affairs between herself and the Mexican. But he needed not to be told that the pride that brought her to dinner, with a red spot of excitement on either cheek and on her lips a refusal to believe in Santos' guilt, soon gave way to wretchedness and dismay. Murder! What woman could forgive that horror? What woman could bear to remember the touch of a hand that was stained with human blood? What would she do? What would happen? What would become of Santos?

Only a great love can lose itself utterly in the object of its devotion. And it was a proof of the unselfishness of Winthrop's passion that it did not occur to him that his own chances of winning Evelyn were any the better for the Mexican's defection. This very love that made him so entirely one with the woman he worshiped was broadening his sympathies. He would have loved Evelyn less had he not felt some momentary pangs of pity for Santos now—Santos, a bitter, fugitive

Cain, alone with his horse and gun in the Wild, or lurking amid the dregs of the White Man's civilization where life was held an easy prey of fierce, untutored passions. Whatever the distrust he had always felt for the Mexican, whatever his anger with the underhand methods of lovemaking and with the suffering inflicted on the helpless girl, Winthrop could not but experience a certain commiseration for the wretched result to the man himself of all that had taken place.

It seemed to the lover that Evelyn's position was little less than tragically cruel. Evelyn, with her wild, sweet joyousness, her imagination, her tender, radiant womanliness—his Evelyn, however distance and time and denial should yet divide them—Evelyn pledged to a murderer! The horror of the thought sickened him. Not for a moment did he suppose that Santos would or could claim her now; not for a moment did he dream that she would listen to the Mexican, even should she ever see him again. But as he thought of her waltzing in Santos' arms at the ball in Kansas City, or her gay ride with Santos across the *vegas*, of the Indian love-song at the ranch-house so short a time before, he trembled lest her spirit forever bear some blighting imprint of these tragic associations. His beautiful Evelyn, so glowingly alive with the pure joy of living, the sweetheart of a man who dealt death! Santos' act was the challenge of the West to the East, of the wilderness to civilization, of primitive, unbridled man to Christianity. Winthrop, product

of established law, of a race that looks forward instead of backward, and of a faith that builds up rather than destroys, shuddered. If he could have spared Evelyn this! If he could bear the wretchedness for her!

It was this thought that was uppermost in his mind next morning, as he gave her his hand to help her into her father's car. She was too heavily veiled for the outside world to gain any inkling of the inward storm through which she had passed. Had she wept? Were her lips still trembling in the effort to preserve composure? He could not tell.

The town of Roosevelt had taken the arrival of the automobilists and the sheriff's posse in the cheerful spirit which characterizes all mushroom conglomerations of humanity. In the centers of light and leading, where the personal equation and whisky were the principal factors of daily existence, it had been unanimously agreed to share the more vital and perennial of the town topics with the interest of the Indians' capture and the presence of the travelers. The departure of the two cars for Phoenix took on an aspect peculiar only to a settlement of the Poker Flat variety. It seemed to Winthrop as if the roughly dressed, curious crowd that stood grouped about the automobiles must comprise the entire population of the town, and he was nervously anxious, for Evelyn's sake, to hurry the preparations for departure.

Colonel Deering was far less acutely conscious

than was Winthrop of Evelyn's distress at the revelations concerning Santos. He had made up his mind that his best course would be to avoid any further allusion to the painful subject. He was confident that the girl's affections were not so deeply involved as to prevent a recovery of her usual spirits. There was no chance that any of them would ever see Santos again, and presumably his unenviable exit was a point in young Hammond's favor. The Colonel wondered if it would be necessary now to any longer pursue Mrs. Eastcott's policy of interrupting *tête-à-têtes* between the young people. For his part, he had always felt like an old fox, dodging around after the pair and resorting to all sorts of undignified subterfuges. He had just now managed to privately question Winthrop about the political meeting surprised in the Apache Canyon, where Villara had been found dead. Winthrop had admitted that his momentary glimpse of the gathering had revealed Santos among the Mexicans, and had confessed that, up to the present, he had been reluctant to speak of the fact. The Colonel had clapped him understandingly on the shoulder and advised him to continue to keep his own counsel—particularly with Evelyn. She must forget the man at once—though there was now another reason to be thankful for her escape! The Colonel's own fingers itched to get hold of Santos, but the Law would square the account. And the injured father settled himself in the car to enjoy the view of Roosevelt Dam.

It was a wonderful sight, this gigantic, granite wall, which inclosed the Salt River in the grip of human conquerors and made the valley one of the most fertile spots of Arizona. Men, working at its base, looked like ants laboring at a monster anthill. Even the travelers far above felt themselves dwarfed into insignificance beside this marvelously conceived product of civilization.

Evelyn, for whose satisfaction her father was avowedly here, though both had forgotten the fact, looked at the monster creation and the great glistening reservoir in silence, and shivered as they approached the Salt River Canyon, beyond. It was there that, according to the sheriff, the Indians had been captured the day before. Did Santos lurk in the desolation of these rocky fastnesses? Was he even now watching the automobiles as they passed?

From the splendidly engineered highway, which, crowding the river for space, wound its way down the canyon between precipitous walls of solemn beauty and grandeur, there was no sign of any human presence among the hills.

Some miles below the Dam, the road left the river and ascended with innumerable curves to a steep ridge, from which there burst upon the travelers a scene of unexpected beauty and unreality of coloring. Before them spread an efflorescence of rocky cliffs, a perspective of strange and fantastic shapes and gorgeous hues, only less impressive than that of the Grand Canyon itself. Far below, across the majestic picture, the Salt

River trailed its silver thread to a slit in the cliff and disappeared from view on its mysterious hidden journey through the mountains. Ahead, the road dipped into deep canyons and wound between grotesque crags that seemed to beckon while they scorned the hardihood that dared invade their solitudes.

Evelyn, speaking for the first time since they left Roosevelt, stretched out her arms, with a child-like gesture. "Oh," she cried, "it is beautiful!—so beautiful that it hurts one's heart! The colors cut like a knife! They are too barbarous, too splendid!"

"Mood, dear, mood!" said the Colonel soothingly. "You are upset to-day, very naturally. You will like Arizona well enough another time."

Though she had stretched out her arms to the crags and cliffs, Evelyn approached them with a sinking heart. Somewhere against this glorious background would she come upon Santos clinging desperately to a jutting rock? Would she catch a glimpse of his wretched campfire around a sudden turn? Would he step forth from behind the next boulder that reared itself, green or crimson, like a mighty, petrified cactus, by the roadside? She pulled her veil a little closer and shrank nearer to her father. That the wilderness, so beautiful, should fill her now with dread! Her eyes dimmed with tears, but they were tears less for herself than for the tragedy of such a glory tarnished by a sense of human wrong.

Beyond the charming little roadhouse that



*"A wonderful sight, this gigantic granite wall which inclosed the Salt River
in the grip of human conquerors."*

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basked in the warm sunshine of the valley beside Fish Creek, there was another long, steep ascent over a road hewn in the sides of the precipitous, glowing cliffs. From the summit, dream cities of blue and rose, watch-towers of green and white, turrets and Titanic spires, walls and mighty fortresses formed a panorama of unspeakable majesty and sublimity. Babylon itself, translated into the realms of the upper air and frozen in color for eternity, could not have presented a more glorious spectacle. The Giant Cactus, rearing its ribbed trunk in lofty solitude, was the fluted pillar of an ancient ruin which spread itself for leagues around. Its tall companions standing along the canyon, niggard of shade or shelter, were wondrous columns of forgotten temples that across the mottled hills cast long, slender shadows less like Babylon's ruined glory than like gibbets on undying Calvary.

Evelyn caught her breath. Was it in such a beauty as this that of old the Indians had wooed and wedded their brides? Was it of such majesty their Iliads sang? Had Santos, that night at the *hacienda* when he held her eyes to his and told his love to the strains of the guitar, voiced something of the fateful tragedy of such a wild? Winthrop had said to her once that the wilderness was grandly simple. But it seemed to her, now, complex—iridescent with changing colors and subtle forms that hinted at mysteries too vast for man's comprehension.

Dazzled, almost oppressed by the wondrous pic-

ture, she closed her eyes. When she opened them again, lo! the Babylon of dreams had vanished, and the rocks were mighty flowers that stretched to the horizon-line in a huge bouquet blended by the distance into tender harmonies of purples and reds, of the glory of gold with the sheen of silver grays, of the living, fiery crimson of coursing blood shaded into the satin softness of roseate sunsets. Below were shaggy forests of stone, green slopes, the semblance of yellow gorse, of purple heather, of sober-hued bracken, and the riotous color of tangled weeds and bloom. Only an Angelo could have painted such a vision, only a God conceive and create!

The road crept downward through ravine and foothill and the scanty verdure of pinion, juniper, and white pine—down—down to the levels of the valley. As they sped along the pathway toward Phoenix, amidst odorous creosote shrubs and bayonet-leaved Yucca plants, the automobilists found themselves in a region of irrigating ditches and cultivated fields. A luxurious perfume of freshness came to them from the alfalfa. Huge, reclaimed tracts smiled with the prosperous settlements of human fortune-hunters. Now and again there came into view Bret-Harte towns—towns that had spilled themselves out of the mines or workmen's camps, where the busy human hive was the main chance and the long line of shack-homes the after-thought—where life was hazardous but, withal, only a small and inconsequential detail of a landscape of mighty, elemental signifi-

cances. Beyond the settlements and the flats lay the fords and the pine-crowned gulches, and narrow canyons sliced through rocks that had wandered away from the mountains to keep company with the jagged craters of a worn-out world still red with the crimes of primeval disaster. And beyond all lay the capital city of Arizona, beautiful with rose gardens and palm-lined avenues, and conscious of approaching statehood in its pretentious capitol.

To Eastcott the route from New Mexico to Phoenix had been hardly satisfactory from a Transcontinental point of view. He would have preferred to follow the historic line of General Kearney's march through Arizona to the sea. He thought regretfully of the Petrified Forests, of the Zuñis—the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola—of the Painted Desert, and of the hundred other wonders which lie in the region of the Grand Canyon. If only the highway projected from the New Mexican state line by way of Flagstaff and Prescott had been passable, there would have been no journey over the snow-covered plateau—there would have been no wounded arm for Winthrop! Another year or two, and the whole tourist-world, which now sought the beauties of Switzerland and the Riviera, might turn to this marvelous picture-book of Nature, whose brilliant-hued pages had so long been sealed except to the hardy few.

Some miles southwest of Phoenix the irrigated fruit country and the ostrich farms came abruptly to an end. The Desert appeared to hover on the

heels of Civilization. One could see it cunningly peering at the last irrigation ditch, the last human habitation, the last rude tent or shack—silent, sinister, biding its time. The enemies were face to face—the Civilization that would transform and the Wilderness that, refusing to accept death, held its eternal menace for venturesome Man. This was the primitive country of the Gila River, where Aztec tradition lingered only in a ruined wall or the storied fragments of unrecorded history, and where only the solitary and occasional white man, timidly feeling his way in furtive experiment, straggled uncertainly beyond the limits of the reclamation lands. Here and there in the wild was the incongruity of a “general store,” and the lonely driftwood of humanity which guards the water-holes of the trail.

As the automobiles left the cactus-strewn lava-beds and the washed-out paths of the unclaimed wilderness, and approached the tawny waters of the parent river, the Colorado, a rare, incipient township now and then came into view. Here, amid a decorative treatment of tin-cans and packing cases on future boulevards, a few individuals were working out their destinies along the lines of the personal equation in a region where there was always plenty of time, where there was land enough and room for all, and where men spoke of “lodes” and “bonanzas” and irrigation as casually as the East talks of the weather and the morning paper.

At Yuma, Eastcott had planned to make the

crossing of the Colorado. In order to visit the Indian schools on the opposite bank, the travelers walked precariously over the railroad bridge, leaving the automobiles to follow later on the ferry.

"Those fellows are taking their time," said Eastcott, as the party came out of the schools and looked toward the ferry-landing for chauffeurs and cars. "I don't see a sign of them yet, and we've got some heavy going through sand if we want to get to Imperial or El Centro to-night."

Evelyn, whose interest in the schools was merely perfunctory, looked back at the opposite shore with a curious sense of relief and regret. So much of tragedy, so much of beauty had Arizona brought her! The whir and gurgle of the ferryboat came faintly to her ears. Through the centuries the river had boldly wrested from the land a path to the sea, and now the land, in retaliation, would suck the river dry through the myriad channels of irrigation. Contest and conquest—the power of the greatest might—was it the supreme and inevitable law of nature and of man? She had fled from Chicago to the mesas to escape it. And now Santos had taught her that, even here in the world of dreams, the terrible law of might prevailed. She had said that Beauty was Truth. But now she wondered if all the beauty she had worshiped but veiled the dread workings of the inexorable law. Was that the mystery of the Wilderness?

She followed with troubled eyes the curving line

of the great river which bore to the distant gulf its plunder of the land—countless fragments of the Rockies, mud and loam, the twigs of the forest, all the flotsam and jetsam of the plains and hills. Every ripple and every wavelet seemed to be laughing at the helplessness of the land and to be enlisted in the service of Might. A week ago she would have said that the river and the land were friends that helped each other. Now she thought of them as enemies—each trying to destroy the other.

Evelyn, withdrawn from her father and friends, stood motionless, regarding the river with troubled eyes. Impelled by some irresistible force which made him forget or neglect his recent policy of self-effacement, Winthrop drifted toward her. At her side, however, he made no attempt at conversation. She did not look up; a strange trembling seized her, as if for the first time she was nervous or embarrassed in his presence. For days they had had no opportunity to speak to each other alone. Yet the minutes passed, and the silence became fraught with a significance which each felt and wondered if the other recognized.

With a supreme effort, Evelyn spoke at last. She was not thinking so much of what she said as of the need of speech. Why should she feel self-conscious with this friend, to whom the Wilderness was simplicity and whose presence had always meant Peace?

“Do you remember an old legend about the Moon Goddess and the Sea and the Land?” she

said. And then she wished she had asked instead about his arm, hung in the sling so close to her shoulder.

“No,” answered Winthrop absently. He was thinking that her eyes had had dark rings below them for the last two days and was wishing that he could tell her, or show her, how he longed to take her trouble and wretchedness on his own strong shoulders.

“It was the Colorado that reminded me of it,” said Evelyn, still a little afraid of the silence. “I remember reading it when I was a little girl. The Ocean made a footstool of the Continents, in order to woo the Moon Goddess as she rode in her silvery chariot through space. When he leaped up in huge waves and tossed his foam and spin-drift to her in kisses, he gloried in the helplessness of his rival beneath him. When he wept white pearls that even the wind and the storm were powerless to sweep him as high as her shining feet, he consoled himself by remembering that the Land was yet more distant than he. Only when the jealous fires that burned at the heart of the Land God incited the victim to a mighty effort, did the Sea God tremble with fear. He who could throw off the Ocean was a rival the pale Moon herself could not scorn. More beautiful now than the Sea, the Land stretched forth his arms to the Lady of the Spaces and decked himself with flowers and robes of green. His head seemed almost to reach to the silvery chariot of the skies above, and, when he crowned himself with snows that sparkled in

the sun, the Ocean lashed himself to a rage of terror and anguish. The Goddess, riding serenely in her chariot, smiled, and her caress fell equally on the lovers. Yet the Land was nearer her smile than the Sea."

"Winthrop," called Mrs. Eastcott emphatically, from the river-bank, "will you please give me my field-glasses from your pocket? I wish you would come over here and tell me if I see the automobiles on the ferry."

"In a moment, Aunt Nell," he answered leisurely, with his eyes on his companion. "If you're looking in the right direction, you probably do see them. They're there, all right. 'Was nearer her smile than the Sea'—that was it, wasn't it, Evelyn?"

Evelyn gave a self-conscious little laugh. It had suddenly occurred to her that, by a stretch of the imagination, the legend might have a more personal interpretation than she had intended.

"In the bitterness of his rage, the—the Ocean planned for the downfall of his rival," she said haltingly. "He—— Well, I believe he gathered the waterdrops still clinging to the garments of the Land God and formed them into streams and mighty rivers. Then he bade them bring him his beautiful rival bit by bit—sounds rather savage, doesn't it?—till one day the Moon Goddess should look down and find the Sea God alone and triumphant."

"If he may not clasp her, at least she looks only



"It is beautiful—so beautiful that it hurts one's heart."

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on him? ” said Winthrop quizzically, as he took the field-glasses from his pocket.

“ No! The Colorado will carry Arizona away to the Sea,” she answered.

“ My gloves will do, or my diary! ” called Mrs. Eastcott.

Colonel Deering, apparently roused now to a sense of his own responsibilities, started hastily toward Winthrop and Evelyn. “ I declare, Hammond, your uncle has been twitting us with the most dismal pictures of what may lie before us in the desert. Come along with me, Evelyn dear, and watch the chauffeurs get our Pegasus off the ferry.”

Evelyn yielded to her father’s affectionate arm. He seemed to her to be talking at random. She was often of late at a loss to understand his manner—so different from his usual, good-humored complacency.

Suddenly she remembered that, a few days before, her father had announced his intention to complete the journey to the coast by train. In the excitement of the news of Santos’ crime, neither Colonel Deering nor anyone else had apparently thought again of substituting the railroad for the automobile.

In spite of the barren wastes that lay ahead, with their possible dangers, Evelyn did not remind her father of his forgotten plan.

CHAPTER XXVII

COUNTLESS ages ago, in the youth of the daz Sierras, the vast basin now forming the Colo Desert was filled by the waters of the Califo Gulf. The wavy line of sand dunes which, gli ing white in the brilliant sunshine, paralle some distance the course of the Southern cific Railroad, marked the northernmost limi the ancient beach. On the rim of the great there still remain, backed by the spurs of an in range, all the characteristic features of a s line—the bays and river-beds, the inlets and bors, the reefs on which the vanished waves beat, even the shells and pebbles of a seas—Who shall say when was wrought the mirac which the silt and sedimental sands of the rado River came to form the deltas and which cut off the dunes from the tidal wa Who shall say when the inland lake—all that left of the waters of the Gulf—took shape an old, sloping beaches shone dry like white bones on the blistering plains? Gradually deep bottom of the bowl, now centered by the ters of the Salton Sea, came to view and Colorado Desert was born.

When first the feet of the White Man penet

to the desolation of the forsaken dunes, the winds and the suns had transformed silt and sand into a powdery dust, which rose and fell with every breath of wind. The basin lay several hundred feet below sea-level—the hottest and most lonely spot on the American continent. The old sea-bed had become a parched wilderness, where scarcely a creature of the wild ventured, and where cactus and salt bush maintained only precarious existence. Like a Cerberus guarding the portals of a torrid Lower World, the jealous mountains held at bay the clouds which threatened to shed their refreshing rains upon the barren soil of that arid valley. The White Man shrank with awe and dread amid the vast silences and mysteries of a solitude where the sun seared and withered with its touch and the winds killed with their hot breath. But the Desert was a siren. It lured him with a sensuous charm, with the magic of a color more subtle and illusive than any he had ever known. Color hovered everywhere—in the cliffs, in the distant mountains, in the sands, in the sheen of the inland sea. Over the dun wastes the *Fata Morgana* of the mirage spread itself, puzzling him with its confusion of horizons and distances. Though during the ages which followed the lure of the siren meant only death, the White Man returned again and again. He defied Fate; he built his cities and his settlements on the Desert's edge; his dimly marked paths trailed across the sands, sign and symbol of his Will.

This was the Desert that now waited for the

automobiles—a beautiful, gray-green monster that stretched itself before them and watched secretly to see what they would do. Could they travel this faint path of the early White Man which had been his tragic trail to the coveted shores of the Golden Pacific?

The automobiles met the Desert with defiance. What did they care for “benches” and *barancas*, sun-baked wastes of desolation, cloying sands, boulder-strewn grades, uncertain paths? Had they come through the rainbow scenery of New Mexico, out of the mysteries of Arizona, only to rush into the seared heart of the wilderness and drop where the sun scorches by day and at night the purple mists gather on the far-off elusive hills? Less than two hundred miles to the flower-jeweled coasts of palms—at the most, they were but a journey of a couple of days!

For hours, beyond the Colorado River, the old wagon-ruts led through a wide valley of yellow sands, rimmed afar by fantastic blue and brown mountains that, like the Desert, seemed to pause and regard the panting cars. Sometimes the pathway was loose gravel winding over a mesa; sometimes there were grades where rocks vied with each other to wreck the adventurers; but, for the most part, the sands billowed over the trail, and already the automobiles needed all their strength to plow through the strange, shifting deep of the desert. Yet, though they were obliged to fight desperately, challenging the Thirst of the parched Wastes and the Hunger of the Trail, always they

were triumphant. If they paused often for breath and to cool off, it was only that they might struggle on again, stronger and more dauntless than before.

The hours of the morning were long and insufferably hot. The sun beat down on the sands, and the sands sent upward a warm, lurid haze to meet the sun. The gloomy, black rocks that pierced the desert sea might as readily have been scorched and seared by the flames of the sky as by any earthly volcanic fires. Even in the crevices where the rare desert rain had left tiny pools, the sun had thrust his cruel rays till only crusted, part-colored rims of alkaline deposit remained. As far as the blue and brown mountains, on the one hand; as far, on the other, as the horizon should have been and was not, for the mingling of sands and sky; far to the rear and in the indefinite distance ahead, the sun blazed down on dry wastes, where in a storm the sands would drift into hummocks around mesquite or cactus, only to be swept back by the hot breeze to the billowy levels of the surrounding solitudes.

Winthrop had read and heard much of the Desert's mysterious charm. But nothing had altogether prepared him for the revelation of its true character. Amid the gray unloveliness of the primitive desert settlements he had expected monotony, and he had found it. It irritated him as much as the pain that now gnawed unceasingly in his arm. This mingling of human life with the wastes that wanted nothing of Man and that

seemed to cry out threateningly to be left alone, was a melancholy and make-shift affair.

Once beyond the dun-colored haunts of his fellows, he saw with astonishment a Desert carpeted with a vegetation whose verdure was more accentuated than the young green of an ideal May. Mountains were never out of sight—mountains, jagged and clean-cut—mountains, snowcapped or low and level like mesas—mountains which shut in the immense botanical garden which sprang out of the barren sand and the silt of the ancient seabed. This was the magic land of mirage, though he strained his eyes in vain for those wonder pictures of the atmosphere. Here was color where he had expected dullness. And the miracle of that color! Winthrop looked out over the sands and the green of the mesquite, sage, and *palo verde* to a middle distance where tints and hues were changed as subtly as in a dissolving view. The gray and yellow of the sands became a pink, the pink a lavender, and the horizon-line a scheme of every shade of blue.

The legend of the conflict between the Water and the Land haunted him. Here the Land was victor, but the Water by its very absence threatened to destroy the life of the dwellers upon the Land. The Desert was endlessly at war. Even the cacti—of which there were here so many varieties—even the mesquite and the ironwoods were armed with a thick set of murderous spines against any intruder who should wrest from them the precious drops of moisture treas-

ured beneath their glutinous coating. The swift, flying leaps of the long-legged jack rabbit, the sly, menacing skulk of the coyote, the lightning dart to shelter of the lizard, the fierce, long claws of the mountain-lions and wildcats which roamed the neighboring hills, even the protective coloring of all these, told bitterly of the Desert's ceaseless struggle for existence. On the sand-ridges there were graves covered with rocks—the nameless resting-places of those human beings who had dared these barren and waterless wastes. Winthrop was acutely conscious of the presence of a hovering buzzard. He was almost oppressed by the sinister formations of heat-distorted, fire-blasted sandstone that bore grim resemblance to the monuments of a giant cemetery. Once, when the chauffeurs were obliged to tie gunny-sacks around the wheels of the automobiles in order to climb a long, shifting sand-hill, he imagined the cars panted with almost human misery and despair. It seemed to him that the Desert which fought with its water-enemy fought also, in its bitterness, with the Land's own child—Man. How long before the whole of this Colorado basin must succumb, as a small portion of it had already done, to the combined power of Man and his ally—the waters which sang in the muddy shallows of the irrigation ditches?

It was long after noon when, in the distance ahead, a rock wall was distinguishable, black in the green and gray wilderness. Then a deserted shanty came into view, and presently a lonely

water-hole, fringed by dusty clumps of mesquite!

The pilot car drew up to the shelter of the dwarf trees and dropped its hot and weary passengers beside the well. But before the Deerings' automobile, with less power to do battle with the Desert, followed suit, luncheon was already spread in the shadows.

The travelers lunched picnic-fashion, crouched on the dry, hot ground or seated on the cushions of the automobiles, which were placed around Mrs. Eastcott's embroidered cloth like the luxurious couches at Pompeian banquets. In the sands around the well were footprints of furtive, furry feet. High overhead wheeled the heavy bulk of carrion birds, floating like great feathers upon the sunny air. Sounds—low murmurs, long-drawn, dolorous whispers—came from nowhere and slipped away again into space. The hidden eyes of the Desert were watching.

At first the travelers were silent, worn by the heat and wearied by the glare of the sun on the sands. The Colonel with one hand waved his wide hat as an impromptu fan, as with the other he helped himself to sandwiches. Evelyn, even paler in the heat than she had been since the news of Santos' crime, sat beside her father and avoided Winthrop's eyes. Eastcott was manifestly uneasy at the slow progress of the morning, and consulted his maps and mileage with more ardor than his luncheon. But, under the influence of companionship and the cooling draughts from the hid-

den springs, conversation presently broke the spell of the monotonous wastes. From somewhere in the recesses of the Transcontinental car bottles were unearthed, and the sound of popping corks punctuated occasional laughter.

Winthrop looked at Evelyn and wondered if she were still thinking of Santos. How would it seem to be alone in these wilds? But the pang of commiseration which he had once momentarily felt for the lonely criminal seemed disloyal in view of Evelyn's pale, troubled face. There was no further need for Winthrop to inquire into his rival's fitness for the girl they both loved. Santos had settled the question for all concerned by his crime and subsequent flight. A great weight of responsibility had been lifted from Winthrop's shoulders. It was replaced, however, by another and heavier burden. Evelyn was unhappy. Santos' relation to McNulty and the chauffeur's duplicity and disappearance—which had so short a time ago seemed of vast importance to Winthrop—were almost forgotten. The events of the last few weeks, from the sending of the telegram from Binghamton to the receipt of the letter from Lomez, were now unimportant—chimeras of a dream. Evelyn suffered. The unraveling of the mystery concerning McNulty could not make her any happier. Therefore, it did not immediately concern Winthrop under these altered circumstances. Later he would again return to its consideration. Just now, he lived, with an intensity he had never before believed possible to any man,

in the present. The thought of the future, drawing nearer with every passing hour—the future, when he would be parted irrevocably from her—served but to augment the vividness of the present. He redoubled his watchfulness; he was nervously conscious of every variation of her mood.

If there was a touch of delirium in the intensity of his emotion, Winthrop, usually so calm, was not conscious of the fact. He had no idea that the increasing pain in his wounded arm was in any way connected with his mental life since the knowledge of Santos' crime and its effect upon Evelyn. Yet, in reality, his anxiety for her and the strain upon his sympathies was having its outward result. The wound, which as he had said troubled him little when he left the Mexican house to continue the journey, now stung him irritatingly most of the time. In its turn, it reacted upon his mind and, with the heat and the glare of the sun on the sand for the last two days, added to his excitement and unrest.

He studied Evelyn's face wistfully, while he attended assiduously but unobtrusively to her wants at the "table." In the hot brilliancy of the desert, his mind wandered irresponsibly to the cool, dark canyon where he had caught her in his arms. He shaded his eyes and looked off across the sands to where the horizon should have been, and then away to the blue and brown mountains, bathed in a silvery haze between the quivering sky and the sun-baked earth.

With the reviving spirits of the party, East-

cott laid his maps aside, and Colonel Deering, familiar with the lore of the Southwest, grew reminiscent. He dwelt with affectionate detail upon the story of "Peg-leg" Smith—that mysterious hero of this desert region, who somewhere between Yuma and San Bernardino had been vouchsafed a fleeting vision of the three buttes of gold. "Peg-leg," explained the Colonel, had once reached the mountains, all but dead of the thirst which consumed him. But he had rushed back to civilization to tell the world of his "find" and to equip himself for the attainment of the riches which now were his. And then he had lost the golden buttes! Alas! somewhere in the desert lay those hills of Gold—waiting for the man who had the hardihood to embark on the Quest, and prove that the wondrous treasure was no idle fancy of "Peg-leg" Smith's bewitched brain—no vain dream of the fanatic horde which still searched the tawny wastes of the mountain-lion and the vulture for golden secrets, and succumbed at last to disappointment and death under the pitiless suns and the luminous stars.

"And may the one who wrests the secret of the Desert from the hand of Time be the oldest and the most grizzled of the grub-stake prospectors!" added the Colonel cheerily.

"If ever he does it, he will need a sixty-horse-power runabout with a one-hundred-gallon water-tank and a ton of gasoline in tabloid form," commented Eastcott, as he rose to inspect his car. "And I for one wish him luck!"

Winthrop followed him, to lay a hand on his shoulder.

“Uncle, what’s that over there in ‘Peg-leg’ Smith’s territory?” he said.

“A little change in the weather?” replied Eastcott, taking the field-glasses from his pocket. “Yes! Seems to be a thick haze! May be a rain shower miles away—though it’s not likely.”

Colonel Deering glanced in the direction of Eastcott’s gaze. “Looks like a bit of wind in that quarter!”

“We’re weather-proof! But I guess we’d better be on the safe side and get along to Brawley.”

Eastcott spoke casually, but Winthrop noticed that both men turned anxiously several times to study the haze. He knew that they had some misgivings as to the possible pranks of the desert weather-man. He, too, watched the horizon.

It was evident to all, in the next few miles, that the dull, colorless haze was creeping stealthily forward and gradually blotting out, one after another, objects within the range of vision. A breathless calm and more oppressive heat fell over the sands like a pall.

Mrs. Eastcott was distinctly nervous. “It’s very strange, John,” she said. “I feel as if the automobile were running through a steam-laundry. What’s the matter with the desert?”

Eastcott laughed with an obvious attempt at nonchalance. “That’s worse than a bull in a

china-shop!" He did not answer her question; but presently he stopped the car.

The mountains in the distance had completely disappeared. The sky was leaden, and the sun, which still shone with a brave effort, gave a brownish light that was both sickly and sinister. A long sweep of wind, speeding across the desert, struck the car and sent the sand flying in a blinding cloud. The sudden blast was followed by a hush and an absolute calm.

"We'll put up the top, I think," announced Eastcott in a matter-of-fact tone. "Win, will you step back and tell Deering to keep close behind us? We won't take any risk on getting separated if there's going to be a blow."

As Winthrop turned away another gust of wind, stronger than the first, rushed across the desert, tearing at the curtains and sweeping up swift mounds and ridges and wide furrows that formed themselves into picturesque patterns across the sands, like giant water ripples.

The Deering car, owing to the clouds of alkali dust, appeared to be much further off than it was in reality. He could see that it had already stopped, and that the Colonel and the chauffeur were also busy putting up the top and the side-curtains.

The dust was whirling now in fitful circles or running swiftly over the furrows like a mocking spirit that trailed its garments of evil over the land. The tiny sand-particles beat against the weathered boulders with the sound of rustling

silk. The Great Master-mason of the Desert was at work on the rocks with his wondrous chisel—that chisel which in ages past had helped to wear away whole continents and change the history of the world.

Winthrop heard his uncle's voice calling him to return, but he paid no heed. He bent his head to the wind and struggled on. His breath came heavily; his arm stung; more than once he slipped in the loose sands; the alkali-dust pricked viciously at his face like hypodermic needles. It was difficult now to see the Deering car. But he fancied that it was moving toward him.

Suddenly the air was full of myriads of whirling, blinding dust-devils that danced and shrieked on all sides like howling Dervishes. The sand-storm had broken unexpectedly and with fury. Winthrop was caught by the full force of the blast. In an instant all signs of the trail were obliterated. He stumbled and fell. Then he heard a sound. He shouted. The Deering car was almost upon him. He wrenched himself upward with an effort to save himself, and the car stopped.

“Great Scott, Hammond! Jump in! Quick!”

A strong hand seized him as he reached for the automobile and drew him in behind the curtains.

Pantingly, Winthrop explained his unexpected appearance on the trail and gave his uncle's message. “The other car is ahead,” he gasped. “We'd better hurry or we'll lose it.”

“ It ain’t anywhere in sight,” remarked the chauffeur, peering out through the clouded windshield into a wall of flying sand. “ And there ain’t any trail now! ”

“ Blow the horn, then. See if we can get their siren.” Colonel Deering’s voice was sharp and decisive.

The man gave a series of feeble blasts. “ Chock-full o’ sand! ” he announced disgustedly.

“ Hark! ” The Colonel bent his ear to the storm.

A faint wail came from afar across the howling wastes.

“ There they are! ” cried Winthrop.

Again the call of the siren sounded, weird and dismal, like the dying shriek of some wounded animal. But now it seemed to come from an opposite direction. The chauffeur hesitated as to which way to turn the steering-wheel.

“ Keep on as straight as you can,” directed Winthrop. “ We may get some sort of shelter, anyway, in the next dry wash.”

The storm was growing in intensity with every moment, and the clouds of sand whirled about the helpless car with increasing fury. Evelyn crouched in a corner of the tonneau, voiceless and obviously oppressed by the heat and the storm. She bent to escape the sand-laden blast as it forced its way between the glass screen and the flapping leather curtains. Winthrop had neither looked at her nor spoken to her, but he knew that she was alarmed.

The car stopped, although the engines were still running.

“ I’ve got to get something over that radiator,” said the chauffeur, with desperation. “ If I could stick to earth long enough out there, I could tie this gunny-sack with a diamond hitch to the bonnet.”

He made a wild scramble along the sheltered side of the car, where he managed to secure anchorage. After a frantic struggle, he covered up the greater part of the radiator. Thick clouds of pulverized dust flew about him, peppering his face and hands. Around the wheels piles of drift sand rapidly collected. The man sprang back into the car and took a firm grip of the driving-wheel. There was not a moment to lose, if the car was to move from the spot. He threw in the clutch. For several minutes the wheels, in spite of chains, could get no grip in the sand. There was a thud—thud—thud, like the dull throbs of a piston, as they spun around. The sound of the engines rose from a loud hum to a roar, in protest against the Herculean task. The car rocked to and fro, backing and darting forward in little jerks, but always retreating to the starting-point. Shoveling was an utter impossibility, and in such a tornado the canvas strips could not have been even unrolled. It would have been suicide for any of the men to have exposed themselves long enough to effectually wrap the rear wheels in thick rope, in the hope of getting a better purchase on

the loose ground. It seemed, too, that at any moment the canopy might be blown away.

“ We’ve got to give her a shove all together! ” cried the Colonel. “ Come on! ”

He crawled out, followed by Winthrop and the chauffeur. Desperately each grasped a wheel, Winthrop putting all his strength into the grip of his one hand. The swaying of the car increased. A moment, fraught with doubt, then—— The men clambered back to their seats.

The machine was pushing its way forward, a prisoner released from bondage, while columns of whirling sand sprang into the path, to rush, twisting and turning in spectral dimness, into the lost spaces of the desert. The dust was everywhere. The passengers, like the automobile, were eating it, breathing it, wearing it. There was a pungent tang of alkali, and at its touch the skin seemed to wither. Though the hour was not late, a leaden darkness, hot and impenetrable, had descended like a pall.

Suddenly the sands fell away slantingly in front of the plunging car. The chauffeur clapped on the brakes. The earth dropped from under. Winthrop caught his breath. A lurch and a jerk, and the automobile plunged forward. The chauffeur deftly brought it round, with a wrench of the wheel, along the length of the “ wash.” There was a moment of suspense as the car hung at an acute angle. Then it flopped gently over on its side. The top rested against the steep bank.

For the moment the travelers were safe from the extreme terrors of the storm. Over their heads the sand passed in flowing, eddying streams, to fall into the gap which the cloudbursts on the mountains had torn in the level of the sandy plains. The wheels were firmly imbedded, but, although the car hung at an awkward angle, the predicament in which the party now found themselves was less dangerous than continued exposure to the full force of the elements.

Colonel Deering's hearty laugh rang out as Winthrop shouted assuringly: "It's all right, Colonel! Wait a minute, till we get the curtains unfastened, and we'll help you out."

"Easier said than done!" roared the Colonel, above the wind. "The suitcases are on top of me, and Evelyn's on top of the suitcases! I shall be a jelly-fish if you don't hurry!"

It was Winthrop who drew Evelyn, with one arm, out of the tonneau and held her unconsciously by his side, while her father released himself with a mighty heave of the piled-up luggage and slid out, legs first, from the car.

All efforts to right the machine proved unavailing.

"We'll have to stick here now till the storm's over!" The Colonel spoke like one who took command of a bad situation. He turned to Evelyn. "We'll make you comfortable with the rugs and cushions, dear. Why, what's the matter, little girl?"

The chauffeur was lighting the big lamps and

the brilliant flare suddenly illuminated Evelyn's face. Her expression was tense, and her eyes were full of tears.

"It—it hurts me here!" She put her hand to her throat. "And I'm afraid for Mrs. Eastcott—and the others."

Winthrop clumsily spread a rug under the lee of the car, and she seated herself against a wheel. "They're all right," he consoled cheerfully. "I'll go and hunt them up in a minute."

"No, you don't!" said the Colonel masterfully. "You'll get no sick-leave from me, Hammond, and I'll have you taking no risks."

There was a long pause. The three men settled themselves in the shelter, near Evelyn. They knew that a sand-storm on the desert was often fraught with peril. Luckily, they had plenty of water in the canteens and there seemed no imminent danger of the car's being buried in the sand.

Presently Evelyn spoke again, plaintively: "I've heard—I read once that people can—suffocate—in sudden sand-storms. Mrs. Eastcott——"

"Tut, tut, little girl! They can suffocate—eating roast beef!" blustered the Colonel.

Evelyn smiled faintly. "Yes, of course! But I mean they can be buried—covered up with sand."

"It has happened, my dear, but never to anyone in an automobile. The Eastcotts may have even better shelter than we have. Don't you be afraid of a little bit of sand."

"Oh, I'm not afraid," said Evelyn, more

brightly. She gulped a little, as she swallowed a mouthful of sand.

“ I’m sure you’re not. I believe I’ll send them a signal, and then you’ll feel better.”

Colonel Deering had been secretly asking himself whether his friends had by any chance failed to make a haven. Had anything happened to them whereby they were exposed to the full fury of the elements? Many a man, he knew, had met his fate before the merciless tempest, or had struggled on for hours, fearful of remaining immovable, lest the pitiless sands should catch at the human obstruction and bury him in the drifting mounds. Without protection of some kind, no life could long endure such a storm. As much to reassure himself as Evelyn, he fired his revolver twice into the air.

“ They may be in a pocket as we are,” he said, to Winthrop. “ At all events, your uncle is a sensible man.”

A faint sound came across the desert. The three men scrambled up the side of the slope, buried to their knees in sand. The sound, little more than a varying note of the storm, was repeated.

“ It’s a shot! ” cried Winthrop. “ They’re out there. How far do you suppose? ”

The Colonel shook his head. “ Don’t know! But they’ve only fired twice, just as I did, so I reckon they’re all right for the present.”

“ How long will this last? ”

“ Don’t know,” said the Colonel again. “ Some-

times holds out for two or three days—sometimes two or three hours. Mammoth's the nearest place. House or two—perhaps a couple of men."

"How far?"

"Too far to hear the shots—some miles! Yuma would organize to look out for us if the blow lasted too long."

There was an ominous silence while the men kicked at the sand heaps that already threatened to engulf them.

"The railroad?"

Colonel Deering pointed into the eye of the wind. "Out there! It may be four or five miles—it may be more. No man could make it now. We've got to stick it out where we are."

The men crept down to the shelter of the car again.

The hours passed and the storm roared on. Winthrop, thoroughly worn out, slept fitfully, stretched on the ground under the slant of the automobile. His wound pained him, and even in his sleep his head moved restlessly to and fro. Evelyn watched him dully.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE Desert, with the advent of the miserable gray dawn, relaxed nothing of its activity. It continued to whirl the sand furiously across its desolate wastes, and, in the howling winds, it still laughed scornfully as it looked on at the plight of its helpless human victims.

Evelyn met the dull, ashen thing that should have been daylight, with wide, sleepless eyes. Æons, it seemed to her, had passed since she first felt the rush of the desert wind and the blinding showers of sand which had obliterated all sense of direction—since the realization that the automobile was lost in the wilderness, cut off from food and man—since the overturning of the car and the frantic but vain efforts to right it while the storm lashed mercilessly and the desert dust threatened to pour into the forlorn retreat! For hours, in the light of the lamps, she had watched the wind as it played hide-and-seek with the eddies of sand. And now, in the somber dawn, she still contemplated the flying sands in the gray and feeble light. Close by, Winthrop was still stretched prone, his head on the pillow which her father had improvised from a coat and a cushion, his feet half buried in a heap of sand. Evelyn

knew that his wounded arm pained him, though he had given the Colonel, hours ago, to understand that he was only weary. In the half light, his face was the hue of the sands; his closed eyes were sunken; his lips were parted, as if he gasped for the air that, heavy as wool, stifled and choked instead of revived.

Evelyn regarded him as dully as she regarded the storm. There was a pathetic appeal about the stalwart figure, lying there helplessly on the sands, and in the wounded arm that moved restlessly in the sling, as if it tried to find ease. But she was not conscious of any particular emotion. After the first rush of surprise and delight at his sudden appearance on the trail, she had fallen again into the lassitude that had possessed her for several days. After all, what did his coming matter? She had frequently read that these sandstorms, once started, raged for days. Already it was an eternity since, huddled against the automobile, she had faced the drifting sands.

She thought of the ranch-house and of Zanuni. She thought of the night that Winthrop, now wounded and panting on the cruel sands, had held the stick with her that Ambrose might leap, with as much grace as an elephant, to and fro for their amusement. Were those memories of another lifetime—of a previous incarnation? Who was that girl who had fancied that Beauty was the great reality—who had loved so passionately the freedom and the joyousness of the Southwest—who had gloried in its color and its brilliant skies

—whose spirit had wandered, dreaming sweet dreams of heroes and nobility and great achievement, among the legends of the Pueblos and the Spaniards?

Where now was Beauty or gentleness or peace? The Wilderness was a friend who had turned and struck her. The Titanic rocks far above the Salt River Valley, even the broad Colorado, had blazoned forth the great law of ruthless Might. Santos, striking down Villara, was its human incarnation. Now the sand-storm shrieked it across the desert; and by and by, when the scanty remains in the luncheon-basket were gone, it would enforce that law on its helpless victims.

Presently she became aware that the sleeper had opened his eyes. Only the day before she had instinctively and without reason shrunk from his glance. Now the brown eyes met the blue ones squarely.

Winthrop and Evelyn looked at each other for several moments. Though the girl did not know it, there was a pathos in her own appearance—her wind-blown hair; the pale, sand-smirched, haggard beauty of her face; the frail shoulders set so valiantly against the wind. A sudden wave of pity swept over the man that so much loveliness should be pitted against the cruel sands.

“Good-morning,” he said, in rather a faint voice, and held out his hand.

She smiled a little as she took it. “Good-morning!”—the mockery of the words!

The sound roused Colonel Deering and the chauffeur, who was dozing in the slanted car, and the Colonel crept forward, with a show of cheerfulness. Winthrop sat up with a little effort, leaning against the car.

In the pause which followed, everyone thought of breakfast. They were all hungry, and the apology for daylight had come late. Day should have broken four hours before.

The Colonel, with cheerfulness apparently undiminished by the gloomy outlook of the morning, produced some sandwiches from a corner of the tonneau.

“ May as well brace ourselves up for clearing weather, by and by! ” he said.

But Winthrop declined, on the ground that he was thirsty rather than hungry and would take a sip from the water-bag instead. The chauffeur also shook his head when the food was passed, and the Colonel calmly replaced the pitiful supply in the tonneau. Evelyn paused in the middle of a famished bite. She looked at the fragment which remained in her hand with a remorseful mental picture of the sandwich as it had been in its entirety three minutes before. When Colonel Deering turned away, she replaced the remnant in the larder.

So she was not alone in her forebodings! The three men also believed the storm was likely to last for several days, and knew that the scanty provisions must be husbanded. Though she fainted for lack of food, she would not eat unless

they did. She would not allow herself to be favored because of her womanhood.

Colonel Deering sat down, with his arm around his daughter. But even his elaborate cheerfulness was not equal to conversation. Beyond a few commonplaces concerning the similar predicament of the Eastcotts, nobody spoke. No one wished to voice foreboding, and it was difficult to talk of lesser subjects.

After a time—about noon, though the meager, sickly daylight gave no sign of added brightness—the Colonel, moved by the sheer force of his dismal brooding, crept out from shelter and climbed the bank. If he had had any intention of trying to get to the Eastcott automobile, it was speedily abandoned. The storm greeted him with a fury that made him glad to crawl back to cover. The chauffeur, a young fellow of bulk and strength, made a similar sally, and he, too, crept back, breathless.

Evelyn watched them start out and return with apathy. She remembered thinking once, long ago, that New Mexico and its charm had “got her.” Now the Wilderness in its cruelty had her—had them all—in its grasp and would not let them go.

Her father was recuperating from his encounter with the storm, leaning back with closed eyes against the front of the car, several feet away. The chauffeur was dozing. Only Winthrop and she faced the storm, wide-eyed and silent, side by side. The Desert itself might have pitied them as they crouched there—the man with his

wounded arm in the sling; the girl, pale, beautiful, tragically sweet, looking at the Wilderness that she loved and that had failed her.

"Will help come?" Evelyn was speaking at random, for companionship, her hands clasping her knees as she stared into the blowing sands.

"When the storm ends," he answered gravely.

She shuddered. Such a wealth of space in the great Southwest and yet not room for life—for their lives! Years and years for the sagebrush and greasewood—so little for them! The Indian had never starved in the desert. He found water hermetically sealed in the plants; the fruit of the agave was wine and food—so, too, the gophers and badgers, rabbits and lizards. Yet she and Winthrop, of a modern civilization that vaunted its superiority over the savagery of the past, must submit to starvation and oblivion amidst that sea of sable.

"It is as if a friend struck you," she said, voicing for him her dull resentment against the Wilderness.

He made no answer for a time so long that she had almost forgotten her remark. Then: "I shouldn't feel that way," he said slowly. "Friends have moods, that's all."

She laughed, with a bitterness new and foreign to her usual serenity and joyousness. "That is what I thought two weeks ago."

He nodded, trying to fix his thoughts on what she said. He understood that her resentment of the Wilderness was also resentment against San-

tos. But his mind was not clear; the pain of his arm had somehow become the pain of his brain. He was thinking, in spite of himself, of the night in the canyon, when she had hurried to him out of the darkness and he had clasped her in his arms, laying his face to her cheek. He could feel the coolness of the night. No, it was the touch of her flesh against his. The darkness was creeping over them, the darkness studded with stars and the silver moon. What was Evelyn saying? That they were stars, he and she, alone in the world? That they belonged to the great simplicities of the West, the primal scheme of Nature, where men and stars and the moon were moved by the same calm, unchanging laws. They were stars, looking down on her far-off pueblo. But what had happened? His cheeks burned. The stars were lost in the whirling sand. She was beside him, yet far away. Evelyn—Evelyn—his heart was calling her. He reached out his hand, crept closer to her. Did she not hear? It was the Colonel and the chauffeur who caught up the words and blew them away from her into the sand mist. But for them, he could tell her—make her understand that——

His brain reeled. The canyon was growing darker. He would sleep, while the thieves, whom Santos had sent to steal the sun, searched vainly in the shadows. He and Evelyn were alone at the heart of the world, one with the great elemental forces! His head drooped—nodded. The elbow on which it rested wavered.

Presently, with the idea of easing his cramped posture and without any particular emotion, the girl transferred the head to her lap. Her father and the chauffeur were apparently asleep. In any case, their observation would not have troubled her now. The storm and its danger made conventionalities seem very unimportant.

How long she sat there, crouched under the shelter of the now helpless automobile, with her dull eyes on the whirling sands and Winthrop's head on her lap, she did not know. It might have been half an hour, an hour. She was cramped from the fixity of her position. At last, moving cautiously and gradually, she contrived a slight change of posture without awakening Winthrop. Then she resumed her lethargic contemplation of the storm.

Evelyn had been staring for some time at a small object half buried in the sand before her mind grasped the fact that she was looking at something which her change of position had revealed near her feet. She leaned forward. The object was apparently a book. She felt no curiosity; only a faint regret that anything, even a book, should become obliterated by the cruel sands. She moved it cautiously with the toe of her shoe, and, when it was within convenient reach, she bent herself gradually forward and, with her outstretched hand, drew it gently to her. It was an ordinary notebook, such as Winthrop was in the habit of using for his press work.

But something about this particular book at-

tracted her. It had a strangely worn and at the same time familiar look. She turned the leaves listlessly. There was Winthrop's writing—the big, easy flowing characters with which he made rapid notes. There were the corrections peculiar to a journalist. But there, too, was something else—her own writing. The notebook was the one on which she and Winthrop had been busy on Raton Pass. Then he had never sent their collaborated "copy" to New York? She had never really thought that he would. But she had not thought, either, that he would keep it to carry about with him.

Evelyn glanced from the little book to Winthrop's face, soiled by the sand and flushed with fever, searching it as in Chicago she had searched his letters. At the same time, she gently pushed the book back to the place where she had found it, partially covering it with the loose sand. Winthrop must never know that she had seen it here. She would take care that he found it himself where it lay.

A wave of emotion, as of returning vitality, swept over her. The blood beat in her pulses. Her breath came quickly. The notebook, in some mysterious fashion, had readjusted her world.

She was faint with hunger and wearied with sleeplessness. Her mind was in no condition to analyze or to clearly consider, but she was conscious of a new realization of Winthrop's faithfulness to her. She remembered the bright afternoon sun and the comfortable sense of well-being

as he and she had sat together on the Pass. Life had been good—life *was* good. For days, since the news of Santos' crime, she had walked in a strange world, where Force had seemed opposed to Force, and Man and Nature warred against themselves and against each other. Now she looked out at the shifting sands. The Desert seemed less cruel. She no longer feared the storm. She found fantastic curves and shapes in the sand-eddies. The mockery of the howling wind sounded less sinister. She fancied the leaden pall of the dust clouds was lighter. She thought vaguely how foolish, indeed how wicked, she had been to lose her confidence and hope. With this sudden accession of throbbing life, no disaster could overtake her. The Desert did not really want to hurt her—to hurt any of them. She thought again of the Titanic rocks of the Salt River Valley. They had been split and twisted only to adorn the world. The Colorado was majestic, sublime, in its sweeps and curves. Even Santos, for a fatal moment the human incarnation of force and cruel passion, was at heart good and noble.

Evelyn let her gaze travel back from the storm to Winthrop's face. One man had taught her a lesson of tenderness and patience and devotion that left no room for thought of self, and she was unconsciously applying his teachings to her sentiment for another. She did not think of the incongruity. Very softly she touched the hair of the sleeper with the tips of her fingers. How

splendid Winthrop was! How wretchedly unhappy Emilio Santos must be! Suddenly she saw the Mexican tortured by agonies of remorse for his terrible deed, hating himself, loathing the remembrance of his uncontrollable passion. It had not occurred to her before that he might long to send her some message, to tell her that he had not meant to kill Villara, that his soul was torn by contrition and regret. She felt the tears in her eyes. Santos, wandering somewhere in the wilderness, perhaps also overtaken by storm, was an outcast from his home and country—all his noble ambitions, his reforms for the people of his race, foiled by his own act and forever dead. She almost wished now that she might hear from him. Then she shuddered. Yet such a message would redeem her faith in him. It would mean that neither she nor her father had been wholly deceived in their estimate of the man. If there were but something she could do to help Santos in his distress!

As simply as a child, she folded her hands. Here in the storm there was nothing that she could do but pray. She bowed her head until her loosened hair almost touched Winthrop's cheek. She was falling back upon Woman's instinctive resource in time of need. In a whisper, as if an audible petition were more efficacious amid the howling winds, she offered up her prayer.

The name that came involuntarily to her lips was not Emilio Santos, but Winthrop Hammond.

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Evelyn, too, must have fallen asleep, faint and utterly exhausted by the long vigil of the night and day, for suddenly she found her father and two chauffeurs moving about. She heard Eastcott's voice from the bank above. Winthrop, with the feverish flush still on his cheeks, was sitting beside her.

The storm was over!

All the joy of a rejuvenation, of a return of the earth love, which is of the deep essence of man's physical being, was upon her. She forgot hunger, fatigue, the horror and anguish of the day and the night that had been. Catching Winthrop's glance upon her, she realized that her hair was tossed about in confusion and her dress awry. She stood up hastily, changing hairpins, smoothing her skirts, straightening her belt, giving a pat here and a pull there, and thinking how strange it was to care again for appearance. She greeted the others joyously, climbing eagerly up the bank to meet the Eastcotts. Mrs. Eastcott, standing by the Transcontinental car and weeping with happiness and relief, clasped the girl in affectionate arms. Eastcott shook hands gayly with them both half a dozen times, and when the Colonel joined the group a moment later repeated the joyous operation, explaining that his car had found shelter beside a huge rock, half a mile away.

While the men righted the overturned machine and made preparations to haul it out of the arroyo, Evelyn looked about her.

Out of the gray desert, through a filmy veil of

sand that still lingered in the air, rose the white dunes, one by one. There were the green mesquites, the sagebush and cactus, and here and there the *palo verdes*. Faintly outlined and colorless rose the distant mountains, with their saw-edge tops and their long spurs thrown out into the bed of the ancient sea.

But the storm had left imprints of its cruelty. There were fresh mounds of sand—wide stretches swept clear by the mocking winds. The soapwood and sage, the mesquite and the great bony cactus, isolated like a leper, were dust-powdered and frayed. The stones were the scoriæ of a mighty furnace which had let loose its fierce blast over the land. The very hills, ragged and treeless, were parched and worn, and once a huge vulture swept down to some half-buried victim of the sands. Now and then the little red-gray wolves of the desert, the coyotes, venturing forth after the tempest, could be seen slinking from sagebrush to cactus and holding aloof from the automobiles, as if even now acknowledging no confidence, no companionship—only suspicion.

Evelyn looked at the scene, as much impressed by the silence of this gray ocean after its fury as she had been by its rage. It was the calm of which she thought more than of the visible ravages of the storm. Her mental unrest of the last week had vanished like the sand-rain. She was conscious of a peace that was part of the desert's calm. The air of the desert was cool. The light of the desert was tender, subdued to a soft gray

and shot through with faint orange rays that hinted at an invisible sun at the edge of the invisible horizon.

The automobile was out of the "wash" at last! The baggage was rearranged; the cushions replaced; the remaining sandwiches hastily dispatched. Evelyn noticed that a corner of the notebook stuck from Winthrop's pocket. Mrs. Eastcott was manifestly anxious concerning the wounded arm and the fever in Winthrop's cheeks. The merry trrrr—trrrr—brrr, with which the automobiles floundered forth in the loose sand, settled to a steady beat of satisfaction.

There was a brief glimpse of an oasis of houses in the waste. The barren hills of gravel and sand flung themselves up at random out of the earth. The desert shrubs grew gradually more infrequent. At last came Civilization, and the weary travelers knew that they were—safe!

Far behind stretched the Desert. Cottonwoods and sycamores rustled a welcome. There was the lapping of running water in the irrigating ditches. The air was soft and balmy, with the sweet, fresh odors of alfalfa. Closely screened houses loomed friendly through the deepening shadows of the Imperial Valley.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE White Man had never abandoned the Desert. Gradually his trails had widened and spread. The fascination of color had been followed by dreams of a wealth which would compensate for the ages of suffering the Desert had inflicted. Out of Death should spring Life. He had explored the barren, jagged rocks, and beneath the harsh surface of the iridescent peaks had found mineral treasure. He had sifted the soils of the basin softly through his fingers and toyed with the shells of the ancient beach. The Colorado River had not worked without purpose: it had shut out the sea. It should now be bent to Man's Will.

He thought of the distant Nile. He heard, in fancy, the music of the Egyptian irrigation ditches. He saw, instead of cactus and mesquite, fertile fields of bursting cotton-pods and verdant alfalfa. He saw the homes of men and women yet unborn.

The White Man's dreams were fulfilled. There came into the Desert engineers and surveyors. Along the northern edge of the valley a railway sped from the River to the Pacific slope. Sluices and dams and canals appeared. Tents arose, then wooden houses, and these in their turn were fol-

lowed by more substantial erections of brick, by telegraph and telephone poles, by newspaper offices and stores. The White Man had come into the Desert to remain. Protected by his strange, musical barricade—the network of irrigation ditches fed by the Colorado—the successful rancher and farmer looked upon his fields and fences, and smiled. In the warm, soft air, beneath the peppers and cottonwoods that edged the life-giving streams, walked the ailing and weak of the older East. The Imperial Valley of the Colorado basin offered not only Wealth, but Life. The Desert, reclaimed, was now forced to make recompense for the lives it had for so many centuries destroyed.

There was a strange analogy between the vicissitudes of this haven of refuge, in which the East-cotts and their friends now found shelter, and those endured by the automobilists themselves. An integral part of the sun-baked wastes only a few years before, the site of the town had also been snatched from the common enemy, the Wilderness. Reluctantly, the Desert had given up its own, as it had yielded up the travelers who had been at its mercy.

The afternoon following the day of arrival was already half spent when Colonel Deering made his appearance among his fellow-men. Hardly a quarter of an hour had passed since he had finished his belated breakfast. Yet he still found himself with an appetite of inconveniently Gargantuan proportions, and he felt an uncomfort-

able desire to indulge in another twenty-four hours' sleep after the excitement and exhaustion of the desert journey. He was now seated comfortably in one of the big armchairs of the hotel veranda, looking down from the superior elevation of the first floor, through an intervening screen of fine wire mesh, upon the leisurely life of the wide, unshaded street. The day was warm, and the screen, at any other time, would have annoyed him with a sense of oppression and restraint. Now, however, life seemed more than ordinarily satisfactory to him, and he was not inclined to be over-critical of any of the details of his surroundings. He puffed contentedly at his cigar. For the fiftieth time he was congratulating himself on the narrow escape from the sand-storm.

"Isn't this heaven?" exclaimed a clear, feminine voice behind him. Mrs. Eastcott, a picture of unexpected smartness and freshness in the most diaphanous of Paris afternoon gowns, came out on the veranda. She was pale, and, in spite of her words, sank down in the opposite chair with a suppressed sigh.

The Colonel half rose and made a polite motion to throw his cigar through the screen. Suddenly recalling himself, he laid it carefully on the arm of his chair, and regarded his *vis-à-vis* with admiration.

"Heaven, certainly, Mrs. Eastcott, and you—if you'll allow me to say so—a veritable bird of Paradise."



"The cottonwoods that edged the life-giving streams."

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Mrs. Eastcott laughed nervously and bowed, fanning herself with rapid, staccato jerks. "Nonsense, Colonel! You know as well as I do that this dress is dreadfully inappropriate. I never thought, while I was gulping down all that sand out there in the storm, that I should ever wear such a thing again. But I feel as if my nerves really need it to-day."

"A woman's medicine, eh? But I don't blame you for being upset. The sand-storm was a terrible experience for you and Evelyn. You've come out a heroine, Mrs. Eastcott, if that's any comfort to you."

"You'd better save that compliment for Evelyn. She's looking as lovely to-day as a full-blown rose. I'm a perfect wreck. I made up my mind, though I was half-buried in sand-drifts, that if they ever dug me out, I should have to go straight to Carlsbad for a cure."

The Colonel smiled sympathetically. "A Transcontinental trip is rather hard on a woman, I'll wager. That was the time you wished you had stayed at home in New York, no doubt."

The fan stopped suddenly. "Oh, no, indeed! I should have died if John had been alone in the storm. Why, really, Colonel, I—I had a beautiful time! But I did tell John that it was disgraceful that they didn't oil the Desert."

"Capital!" exclaimed the Colonel, soothingly. "Eastcott's still asleep, by the way?"

"Like a dormouse!"

"And Hammond? I peeped into his room, a

short time ago, but his eyes were closed and I didn't disturb him."

"Still rather feverish. The doctor was for having him go on by train to Los Angeles. But you know Win. He's absolutely refused to give up the trip before he gets to the Coast. I really believe it would make him seriously ill if the doctor insisted. We've compromised on a two days' rest here, and on a leisurely trip to San Diego. Then Win's perfectly willing to go with me by train to Los Angeles."

"Humph!" said the Colonel. "Poor fellow! I'm sorry. But you don't mean that Mr. Eastcott must finish the trip without you?"

"I think I shall be able to take the run out from Los Angeles or Pasadena, perhaps, just for the fun of sharing in his welcome. Of course, I shouldn't mind if the trip ended here on the veranda for all of us. But, if John can face the Desert again"—she shuddered—"I suppose I can."

"But, really, your sacrifice of the trip up the coast is quite unnecessary! I have to go on by train—yes, positively, this time—from San Diego. My car needs a week's doctoring on its own account. Evelyn and I will take Hammond on with us, and you can finish the journey according to your original plan."

"It wouldn't do," she said, gratefully. "I shouldn't have a moment's peace about him. Besides, Colonel!—what kind of a chaperon are you? What did we agree upon? To throw those two at

each other's heads or to separate them—religiously, systematically separate them?" Mrs. Eastcott was sitting erect, with revived animation.

"Ah, ye-es! That's so! But—er—well, I don't think we need consider that—er—agreement—any longer. In fact, I suggest that we cancel it. That wretch of a Santos is off the field. We will—er—just let matters take their own course."

Mrs. Eastcott scanned him closely, in evident surprise. Under her gaze, the Colonel shifted restlessly and made haste to change the conversation. "This weather, as you say——"

"My dear Colonel, I want to ask you whether you conducted yourself properly as chaperon while Win was with you and Evelyn during the storm? Did you keep watch like—like a lynx?"

"Eh? What? Oh, yes, I watched." He did not think it necessary to explain what he had watched—a girl with a young man's head pillowed in her lap. Evelyn's secret—if secret it might be—was safe with her father.

"Did you place yourself between the two?"

"Er—sometimes—yes." The Colonel was visibly embarrassed.

"Did you see to it that Win sat at one end of the—whatever you were in—and Evelyn at the other? Did you make sure that they had no opportunity to talk with each other, or look at each other, or smile at each other?"

Colonel Deering glanced at the street, as if he

meditated a sudden escape through the
 He wondered if he appeared as guilty as
 He stammered some remark to the eff
 no one did much talking during the storm.
 Hammond, he slept most of the time,
 And Mrs. Eastcott was a wonderful woman.

"Now I'd like to know just what you
 that, Colonel," she commented.

"You're a wonderful woman!" repeated
 Colonel, even more emphatically than
 He uncrossed his knees and brought his foot
 with a decided thud.

She looked at him with a puckered brow
 appreciate your good opinion, Colonel, except
 But I shall have to consider that remark very
 nerves are more settled, in order to appreciate
 full significance. I believe you're keeping
 thing back from me!"

"My dear Mrs. Eastcott! Why should
 think—— What do you suppose——"
 Colonel was hopelessly floundering in deep
 conversational waters. Much to his relief
 Eastcott herself came to his rescue.

"That reminds me: I'm keeping something
 back from you. Win's had some news. Mc
 free!"

"Good!"

"I don't know whether Win told you
 but he's had a detective in Santa Fé search
 the poor fellow."

"Found McNulty by Lomez's letter,
 pose?"

“ We don’t know any of the details. The detective’s message simply says that he left Santa Fé, three days ago, to join us. There will be a letter at San Diego.”

“ Three days? ” repeated the Colonel. “ Why, he ought to be here by now—ought, in fact, to have been here yesterday, I should think. Does he know where to find us? ”

“ Oh, yes! John left all the addresses. Win seems rather worried, because McNulty takes such a time to get here. I fancy he thinks the chauffeur is a bit of a suspicious character.”

The Colonel nodded, leaning forward to look through the screen. “ There’s Evelyn! ” he exclaimed eagerly, changing the conversation abruptly. “ She looks like a full-blown rose, as you said.”

Mrs. Eastcott looked down to see Evelyn coming slowly up the unshaded street that eight years before had been desert sand. The girl was apparently none the worse for her trying experience during the storm. She walked lightly; her bearing betokened neither fatigue nor ill-health. As she approached the hotel, she caught sight of her father and her chaperon, and waved her hand.

At the same instant, a boy ran out from a doorway and spoke to her. He was a lank, ill-dressed fellow of perhaps fourteen years. His head was covered by a shock of uncombed, black hair. His skin was dark.

The watchers on the veranda saw Evelyn pause in surprise. She bent toward the boy. A second

later he disappeared within the doorway. Evelyn stood motionless. Then she came slowly on toward the hotel. She did not look up at the veranda again. Presently the Colonel and Mrs. Eastcott heard her moving about her room, which opened outward a few feet from the spot where they sat.

“ Evelyn! ” called her father. “ Evelyn! ”

The girl appeared at her door.

“ Yes, Father,” she said. She lingered at the threshold.

“ Come out, dear,” urged the Colonel, heartily. “ Let’s have a look at you? ” He reached out his hand toward her. “ Well, how does my little girl feel after the storm? ”

Evelyn stepped out on the veranda. “ Splendidly, Dad! Don’t I look as if sand were my native element? How are you? ”

Mrs. Eastcott scrutinized her closely. The chaperon fancied that the girl would have preferred to remain in her room—that the eyes were almost too bright and that the cheeks were flushed with some secret excitement. What had the Colonel meant by his mysterious assertion a few minutes before? Had the “ wonderful woman ” already brought about the happy consummation of the love affair?

“ Oh, I am so sorry! ” Evelyn was answering a remark of her father’s in a voice of gentle distress. “ I hoped he would be so much better to-day! Is there anything that I can do for him, Mrs. Eastcott? ”

Mrs. Eastcott's spirits fell with a thud to the level of the commonplace. It was quite evident that Evelyn had made no advances to the invalided Winthrop. Any sympathetic woman might offer in the same tone to "do" something for any sick friend. For the fraction of a second Mrs. Eastcott felt almost impatient with the girl.

"Yes, my dear; there is something you can do," she began, with unwonted spirit. Then she bit her lip, half frightened at a blunder which might easily frustrate all her maneuvers. "I mean that Win was longing—— I was wishing I had some flowers for his room, some—some—orchids, or—or—larkspur, such as grows on the—the desert, you know."

Evelyn and Colonel Deering stared at her in amazement.

Mrs. Eastcott suddenly realized the absurdity of her words. "Oh, dear, dear! What am I saying? I am so worried that I can't even speak intelligibly." And she buried her face in her handkerchief as the easiest means of escaping her companions' inquiring glances.

Colonel Deering was completely mystified. Ten minutes before he had been assured that Winthrop's condition gave no cause for anxiety. Involuntarily, however, he blindly followed the cue of his fellow-conspirator. His smile gave way to an expression of gloom.

"Poor Hammond!" he remarked, vaguely. "A sad case!"

Evelyn was now thoroughly alarmed. "Father

—Mrs. Eastcott—is Winthrop dangerously ill? Why didn't you tell me? Did the storm——?” She leaned against a veranda-post, too faint for a moment to finish her sentence.

His daughter's genuine dismay smote Colonel Deering with a startled sense of his own cruelty. As he had told Mrs. Eastcott, there was no further need for paternal craftiness. With the rapid skill of a “prestidigitateur,” he changed his tactics. His dismal countenance became suddenly jovial.

“ ‘ Dangerously ill ’? Ha, ha! That's good, little girl! ” he laughed. “ Why, Hammond's not ill at all! He's just upset by the heat and the storm. His arm bothers him a bit, but he's to be allowed to go along to the coast, and then he'll take the train up to Los Angeles. There's nothing to worry about; Mrs. Eastcott, here, will say so herself.”

Evelyn was confused. She put her hand to her head, trying to grasp the import of her father's words. What did her companions really mean?

Mrs. Eastcott's shoulders began to shake. The chaperon always understood the Colonel better than she did his daughter. He was now in as awkward a predicament as his comploter had been a moment before. She could hardly control her amusement.

“ There, there, dearest! ” continued the Colonel, joyously. “ Don't you give Hammond another thought. His Aunt Nell will take you into

his room after dinner to see for yourself how well he is. Tell your old Dad about your latest admirer, the Mexican down there." He flipped his handkerchief mischievously toward the street.

Evelyn started. "Whom—whom do you mean?" The words were little more than a hoarse whisper.

It was evident to the Colonel that her anxiety for Winthrop had completely upset her. He rose and took her hand, drawing her gently to him, at the same time broadening his smile reassuringly.

"Sly puss!" he laughed. "They're all in love with you, and I don't wonder. What did the young chap, who stopped you just now, have to say to a pretty girl like you, eh?"

"Oh, the boy? He—he—could not speak much English. He saw me walking to the hotel, and——"

She drew almost imperceptibly away from her father. Her eyes were large and frightened. She glanced toward the door of her room. The Colonel felt more of a brute than ever.

"Of course, of course, dear! Now don't worry any more about Hammond. He's doing finely; isn't he, Mrs. Eastcott?"

The shoulders beneath the white muslin gown quivered ominously. Then a smothered voice answered reluctantly: "It's not Win I'm worried about so much as—as"—Mrs. Eastcott searched her mind desperately for a sudden inspiration—"as McNulty!"

The words were no sooner uttered than the

foolishness of her explanation was apparent to her. She could imagine the look of utter surprise upon her companions' faces. She was overcome with another fit of silent laughter and buried her face deeper in her handkerchief.

"McNulty!" echoed the Colonel and his daughter, together.

Mrs. Eastcott's incoherence and her father's laboriously cheerful manner and exclamation only served to confirm Evelyn's suspicion that Winthrop was seriously ill. At the same time her desire for escape increased. If she were asked again what the Mexican boy had said, she did not know how she would answer.

Colonel Deering, however, had forgotten the boy.

"That's so!" he exclaimed, gayly, recovering himself. "We forgot to tell you, Evelyn, that McNulty's free. Isn't that fine news? That—that's—er—what's the matter with Mrs. Eastcott, you know."

Evelyn looked more confused and distressed than ever. She glanced from one to the other of her companions, feeling very much as if she were walking in a maze from which she could find no outlet. "I think I must go in now, and——"

Mrs. Eastcott made a heroic effort at self-control, and dropped the handkerchief. "McNulty is such a faithful fellow," she began; and, seeing the expression on Evelyn's face, immediately retired into the handkerchief again.

The Colonel's cheerfulness betrayed a faint annoyance. He did not feel equal to the situation.

"Of course," he said, awkwardly. "Now, Evelyn, you're not to worry. You shall see McNulty after dinner—I mean Hammond. No one can make out what has become of the fellow."

"Oh, Daddy!" Evelyn's cry was full of horror. "Winthrop is gone?"

Mrs. Eastcott looked up again. The girl's unconcealed emotion was most gratifying. But she, as much as the others, felt the immediate need of ending the interview.

"Win is in his room, asleep," she announced, rising. "I think Evelyn had better lie down for a little, too; had she not, Colonel?" She put her arm affectionately around the slender figure, and led Evelyn toward the open door.

"Yes! Certainly, certainly," agreed Colonel Deering, with alacrity. "Mind, Evelyn, you're not to worry about anybody. Everybody is all right."

"Very well," said Evelyn. She was now so hopelessly entangled in the maze that it was quite impossible to make any further effort to work her way out to comprehension.

Mrs. Eastcott turned away abruptly.

"I shouldn't have been able to control myself another instant," she gasped. "Oh, what a mess we made of the whole conversation!"

Colonel Deering mopped his brow with an air of utter exhaustion.

“ I never felt so wholly like a fool before my own child,” he said, disgustedly.

Evelyn had closed the veranda-door and sunk limply into a rocking-chair. She was thankful to be alone at last. Gradually, from the confusion of her mind, two facts advanced themselves into clearness.

Winthrop was not dangerously ill. Santos had sent her a message.

CHAPTER XXX

IN the desert storm, Evelyn had wished for some message from the fugitive. Now, shudderingly, she realized that the Mexican boy had fulfilled her wish. Hurrying to her from the doorway, he had whispered in broken English that "someone"—he gave no name—must speak in secret to "Carmen"; "someone" would be watching on the road to San Diego. Evelyn had understood at once the identity of that "someone" who sent a message to "Carmen." She shivered again as she recalled the hurried, furtive words of the Mexican boy.

A hundred questions whirled through her aching brain. Was Santos near? Had he been watching her from some secret covert as she passed along the street? Had anyone overheard the whispered message? Did her father or Mrs. Eastcott suspect anything? How had Santos learned that she was taking the automobile journey? How had he traced her to the Imperial Valley?

Evelyn cowered in the rocking-chair. The excited flush that had served to assure her father of her well-being had died away; she was pale and trembling. She had longed to be alone; yet solitude frightened her. She was in terror—terror

lest Santos should suddenly appear before her—terror lest anyone should discover his retreat. She shrank from the thought of the murderer. Yet she was full of dread of the swift justice that might overtake him were his whereabouts made known. Fear obsessed her. Santos' message had cast a grim shadow over her, from which she could not escape, any more than can a child who is locked into a darkened room. She grew faint at the realization of her actual communication with the man who had, by his crime, shut himself off from his fellows and forfeited all claim to the girl he loved. Did the world know what the Mexican boy had said to her, would it not point the finger of scorn at her as an accomplice and condoner of murder? She had none of the faith in her lover that had buoyed other women in like circumstances to heroic loyalty—no real devotion to uphold her belief in the man who had called to her out of the wilderness. Love would have given her strength in those terrible moments of question and doubt. Without it, she was agonizingly conscious of the helplessness of her womanhood.

Her impulse was to tell her father at once what the boy had said to her, and to urge him to flee with her to some spot where Santos could never find her. But her filial affection prevented such a confidence. Colonel Deering, knowing Santos to be near and to have had the temerity to send her a message, would not rest till he had discovered the retreat of the criminal; remembering the fate of Villara, she grew sick at the thought of

what might happen. But what should she do? Should she ignore the message and take the train to San Diego? Should she continue the journey as if nothing had happened and trust to Fate or Providence to prevent any encounter with Santos? Would she be safer on the train or by her father's side?

That night Evelyn took her dinner in her room, pleading a headache. But, when Mrs. Eastcott sent her word that they might see Winthrop together for a few moments, she rallied her courage and accepted the invitation. Yet, in the invalid's room, she was almost overcome with the fear that she would reveal her secret. She felt that the expressions of her sympathy for the sufferer were as incoherent as had been the remarks of her father and Mrs. Eastcott that afternoon. She felt that Mrs. Eastcott was too clever not to readily see through the thin mask of forced smiles and halting words. A comment or a suggestion, and Evelyn dreaded lest her self-control break down and she unburden herself to her chaperon. She caught a glimpse of herself in Winthrop's glass. The pallor of her face alarmed her. Winthrop's eyes were upon her, questioning and anxious. A plea for advice and help quivered on the tip of her tongue. She longed to take this other lover into her confidence. Yet she knew that he would be as horrified as her father and Mrs. Eastcott at the bare thought of her ever seeing Santos again.

Evelyn did not know exactly how she reached

her room. But the secret was still hers—hers to guard, tremblingly and with shame—hers to ponder and to consider.

For she must consider it. She was a woman, not a child. She could not run away, nor shift her burden to someone else's shoulders. She must be strong—she would be strong. She would—she shivered—she would not ignore the message from Emilio Santos!

The great resolve cleared away some of the clouds which had disturbed her spiritual vision.

Two courses were open to her. Either she must by some means find the Mexican boy and get him to convey to Santos her definite refusal to meet him or—she must tacitly agree to the secret interview.

Suddenly she thought of the sand-storm. Then she had fancied Santos as despairing, crushed, remorseful for his terrible deed. Was he, through the Mexican boy, pleading for a chance to tell her of his anguish of regret, to pray for forgiveness for the suffering he had caused her? Her whole being shrank from a secret interview. Yet only so, she knew, could he speak with her before he left the United States forever. Perhaps this was her chance to help him. Perhaps he wished to make a request that she would further the work he had begun for the betterment of his people.

She had heard of men who were redeemed to a new and better life through some slight proof of a woman's confidence. Perhaps, if Santos could only safely escape into Mexico, he might yet ex-

plate, to Heaven at least, his frightful crime. In secret, unknown, he might yet in some manner contribute to the great " reforms " which he had begun. Should she—could she summon all her courage to grant to her former lover the meeting he desired?

All through the sleepless night and all next day she asked herself that question. At times her fear returned upon her, and she told herself that she could not meet a murderer. At other times she felt that the future of two lives depended upon that secret meeting—not only the man's redemption, but her own. To hear from his lips his protestations of remorse would convince her forever that she had not been mistaken in him. Her whole philosophy of life hung in the balance.

She drew a long breath. She would not refuse. She would meet Santos on the road to San Diego.

Evelyn came down to breakfast on the morning of departure, her head held high, on her face an expression of calm resolve. She was no longer afraid nor conscious of her helpless womanhood. She had little to say, but, when she did speak, her voice betrayed none of the shrinking dread of the last two days. An hour later, Winthrop, observing her from his cushioned corner of the tonneau, as she and Mrs. Eastcott arranged the wraps carefully about him, was conscious of the girl's added dignity, and wondered, wistfully, if he would ever probe to the real depths of this woman soul. He had thought that he understood her so well, yet here was a new and unexpected

phase of her—a *nuance* with which he was totally unfamiliar.

What was she thinking? What had happened, to envelop her in this sweet calm, so different from yesterday's strange, trembling nervousness? His feverish mind reverted to the sand-storm, as it had done hundreds of times. Was Evelyn really, perhaps, beginning to care a little for him, after all? Might he try to make her unsay the words she had said at the *hacienda*? As soon as he was well, he would begin his novel of the Southwest. He would take steps to found his ideal newspaper. He would—— How his arm and head throbbed! But he would try to do something, even yet, to interest Evelyn—at least, to show her that, in any event, her influence had stimulated the best that was in him. He clung desperately to that thought as the cars drew swiftly away from the town to seek again the sands of the open desert.

Until she was in the automobile, Evelyn had not realized that no details of her meeting with Santos had been arranged. She did not know whether he was awaiting her or whether he followed. She knew the route only vaguely, as a trail through mountain and desert; indeed, she had not dared arouse suspicion by inquiry. She could not understand how she could meet Santos without her father and her friends becoming aware of the fact. But the lofty calm of her resolve did not desert her. She would do her part. Fate would provide the opportunity.

She must husband her strength for the ordeal ahead of her. She shut her eyes to the sandy trails, the steep "benches" that broke the monotonous expanse of the plains, the rough lava-beds, the harsh cactus wastes. She refused to find any terror in the visions of the long desert stretches where all signs of human habitation had ceased—in the sight of the lonely, melancholy-looking shack where a solitary man and his dog stood guard over the precious water-hole. She determinedly forgot the horror and repugnance which Santos' crime had before aroused in her. She said to herself that Santos was penitent—that she must not falter—that she must carry out her resolution.

Progress was slow. Sand clogged the wheels; the lava-strewn path jolted the cars unmercifully. Eastcott, anxiously admonished by his wife, made frequent stops, that Winthrop might rest from the fatiguing motion.

At last the desert came to an end. Before the travelers rose jagged walls of dull-red and gray rock that, as the cars advanced, grew higher and ever higher. All signs of vegetation had disappeared. Suddenly a mountain-pass, level and winding, opened ahead, as if wide jaws were stretched to engulf the daring invaders. They had entered the Devil's Canyon, whose sandy floor for ages had been the channel by which the mountain torrents had found an outlet to the thirsty sands beyond.

Evelyn regarded the scene now in silent awe.

She looked up at the grim, forbidding walls—down at the rocky floor. She felt the breeze, cooled by the shadows, on her cheeks. She heard the thud of the wheels as they ground their way through the golden inlet where the master-masons, the waters and the winds, had chiseled a majestically solemn path into the heart of the mountains. Behind her stretched the desert, neutral and parched. Around her rose a nature-made Karnak of awe-inspiring profundity, a mighty temple of towering rock and jagged crag.

The girl was conscious of something in her own spirit which to-day fitted the hush and mystery of the Canyon. She drew strength from the sight of the bare, silent masses of rock. They prepared her for some strange, grimly religious ceremony beyond. The mountains were associated with sacrifice—the sacrifices of the men and women who would win the wilderness for civilization. She, too, entered the mountains for sacrifice—not, as in Chicago, the sacrifice of her comfort and freedom in the mean ways of a great city, but the sacrifice of her womanly fear and shrinking upon the altar of an ideal.

Beyond the long passageway of the Canyon, the trail began to climb. The automobiles took the steep ascent pantingly. The rocky path became a series of steps, over which they crawled with difficulty. The sharpness of the stones cut the tires until loose ribbons of rubber flapped ominously with every revolution of the wheels.

Sudden, sharp twists in the narrow trail necessitated constant watchfulness on the part of the chauffeurs, lest the cars and their occupants be dashed over the unprotected edge of the precipice. Evelyn sat silent, her eyes fixed on the path ahead. The automobiles ascended slowly, as if, though pulled upward by some invisible force, unseen wraiths who inhabited the solitudes strove to draw the earth-men back to the levels below.

At the summit of the pass there was a pause for rest and luncheon. Evelyn searched the mountains with calm, questioning eyes. She saw in this grim, barren waste nothing to indicate any other human presence than that of the automobilists themselves. All was silence, desolation. If Santos had been following on horseback, he had as yet given no sign. If he was ahead, there was nothing to tell her so. The time for the secret interview had not yet arrived. It was already long past noon. For Winthrop's sake, the journey to San Diego would consume some part of another day. Even now Mrs. Eastcott was nervously suggesting camp. It was quite possible that the morrow, and not that day, would bring the ordeal for which Evelyn had braced herself. For the first time since she had made her decision to meet Santos, her spirit quailed before the threatened delay; but the instant's shrinking passed. If it was best to wait, she could wait.

The descent of the mountains was as trying to the temper of the cars as had been the upward

climb. Slowly, cautiously, they crept from ledge to ledge. The brakes sent harsh, rasping protests into the awe-inspiring silences. From far below the edge of the precipice rose great piles of loose, reddish rock that, seen from a lesser elevation, would have been hills. Above, towered other huge piles of loose rock that were the mountains already passed. The Devil's Canyon was the wreck of a world, the aftermath of some awful cataclysm that had torn the earth to its foundations and hurled the débris of rock and crag and peak into bewildering and chaotic confusion.

Once, Evelyn's heart stood still. A tall, dark, lithe man appeared around a bend in the trail. He led a burro, loaded with the outfit of a camper. He passed, and she recognized in his tense face only the familiar traits of the dreamy prospector. Again, a heavily-laden freight wagon, drawn by a dozen mules, loomed up abruptly at a dangerous curve. The girl scanned the faces of the men, lest Santos might be among them in easily penetrated disguise. Then she smiled at her useless anxiety.

At four o'clock Eastcott's car stopped. The descent had been accomplished without accident. Already the landscape had taken on a more gentle aspect. The rocks had given place to a forest plateau of open glades, where brown, hay-like grass sprouted in isolated tufts. There was a sprinkling of cedars. Everything hinted at the more luxuriant growth yet further ahead in the neighborhood of the sea. One understood that.



"The Devil's Canyon was the wreck of a world."

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the wilderness was left behind—that civilization reached out a welcoming hand.

Though the sun was still well up in the heavens, the tents were pitched. Evelyn and Mrs. Eastcott laid out the toilet brushes and set the candlesticks in place. In the men's quarters, Colonel Deering superintended the making of Winthrop's couch of cedar boughs and cushions, and insisted upon the invalid's immediate repose. The chauffeurs were busy with oil-cans and cloths. Eastcott was in the back seat of the Transcontinental car, overhauling his camera.

Evelyn came out of Mrs. Eastcott's tent. At the same moment, the figure of a man appeared for the fraction of a second around a huge boulder, some distance up the trail along which the travelers had just come. Evelyn saw him. He disappeared.

The signal had come. Santos was there, on the trail. He was waiting for her. Fate had given the opportunity to carry out her resolve.

She did not waver. Glancing about to make sure that her father and friends did not observe her, she walked rapidly back over the trail. Her head was held high. Her eyes were bright. She was going to meet the most important crisis of her life. But, curiously, she was not afraid. The same lofty calm that had supported her through the day supported her now.

She climbed the path with swift, unhesitating steps. Beyond the boulder, which shut off all view of the camp, she paused. No one was in

sight. Santos had evidently gone back along the trail as a precaution against any interruption from below. Evelyn walked on.

Suddenly, without warning, a man slipped out from behind a ragged rock and caught her wrist—a man in shabby leggings and a red shirt, open at the throat.

Evelyn turned with a start. Santos, rough, uncouth, disheveled—Santos, pressing her to him, his hot kiss upon her lips, murmuring her name!

“Evelina! *Carissima!*” he gasped. “The horses are hidden in the Canyon. Come!”

His words were impetuous, broken, rapid. His eyes seemed to devour her.

Evelyn stared at Santos in paralyzed astonishment, the color slipping from her cheeks and leaving them ashen. She could not speak. She could not move.

His face was haggard, unshaven, wild with evident distress. His clothes were mud-stained and torn, as if for days his companions had been the unfriendly rocks. The eyes under the slouch hat were bloodshot. His whole aspect was tragic, pitiable.

Still holding her in his embrace, the Mexican glanced furtively from side to side, like a hunted animal.

“I—my Señorita—I—hunted—the last of the Santos—hunted like a dog from the country of my fathers!”

She tried to draw away. Her lips framed some

word that they could not utter. She still stared at him, terrified, questioning.

“They may be watching!” Santos clasped her closer. “But I have your promise! We go to the Wilderness, you and I—the Wilderness of the azure nights. Why are you cold? Why do you not move? We must go, my Evelina!”

With a supreme effort, she tried to regain her self-control. “No!” she gasped. “No, no!”

“Then why did you come to me?” he cried, the tragedy in his face echoing his words. “You do not understand. I flee! But I shall still labor for my people. The mesas that never change have said it—a Santos shall bear no defeat. The storm will soon be over.”

He half-lifted, half-dragged Evelyn in the direction from which he had come. She straightened herself suddenly, as a rebellious child urged forward against its will. Her face was as tragic as his own.

“You are mad! What are you doing?” she cried.

“I take you, *Carita!* There are priests who shall marry us to each other. The Wilderness is calling us! Did you not know that for this I sent you the message? You are mine. You have promised.” He was drunk with the lees of despair.

Evelyn slipped from his grasp. “No! I cannot! I will not go!”

“You shall come. The Spaniards of old—did they not seize their brides? Have I not sacrificed all to win you? You shall know everything. Lis-

ten! Did I not arrange that the Americano should not find you in Chicago? Ah, you did not guess! You did not know my men carried you off from Raton to me? No, no! You cannot condemn. It was because I loved you, my Evelina, as only a Spaniard knows how to love."

"Your men?" Evelyn shrank away, her eyes still on his face. "Villara!" she whispered, in a choking voice.

"That, too—it was for you, my Beautiful, for you!" he exclaimed, hoarsely.

"Oh!" She covered her face with her hands, moaning as if he had struck her.

He went on unheeding. "Villara, his confederates—they persecuted me, drove me out from the leadership, because I loved you, an American."

"For me?" she gasped. "Murder?"

"They reviled me; they taunted me, spat upon me—a Santos! They called me traitor to the Cause."

"Well?" Her voice was cold.

"Villara set himself in the seat of a Santos—Villara of the oily tongue. I defended my honor, my pride, your name."

"Well?"

"He had insulted me before my people. We met. We drew. It is the law of the West. He would have killed me. I—— But he is gone. He troubles us no more."

"And you?" she cried. "You have no regret, no remorse?"

He laughed bitterly, snapping his fingers with his old, defiant gesture.

“ You do not understand.” He stamped impatiently. “ The East—will it never know the West? It was nothing—a happening of every day. A man steals your horse or your honor. To shoot him—that is no crime here. In one—two—three months, it will be forgotten. I shall be back in New Mexico.” Suddenly his voice softened. “ See, my Beautiful! I am lonely, weary, miserable! I am in need. For you I have done all. For me, too, you will do something? ”

The appeal brought back her self-control.

“ Yes,” she said simply, “ I came to do something. I came to help you. But I will not go.”

His eyes met her steadfast gaze. For the first time, in spite of her assertion, he began to doubt his power over her.

“ Oh, my Evelina! ” he pleaded. “ For days I have followed you. You did not know. I saw you with the Americano—the cold Americano, who came to rob us of our happiness. Sometimes I was behind. Sometimes I was in front, watching, waiting. Once I have heard the ‘ One-two-three! ’—so—of the horn, just in time to hide myself from you.” He looked round involuntarily. “ In three months the Southwest will not remember. We shall return to the great work. Have you forgotten it? A Santos has bent himself to the love of a woman of the Americanos. We shall found together an Empire, the Latin race united;

and you—you, my Beautiful, the Queen of them all! Our children—they shall become great. The woman of the Americanos shall save my people. You must—you shall—go!” Again he caught her hand, but with less fierceness than before.

Evelyn stood before him, unprotected and alone. Yet, strangely, she felt no fear. Though her future appeared to hang in the balance of a desperate man's will, her calm had returned to her and she felt strong. Santos' pleading made the Mexican seem suddenly pathetic to her, but the utter absence of any point of view but his own widened the distance between them irrevocably. The medieval manner of his love-making her own romantic nature could excuse. But that he should glory in Villara's tragic fate! She drew herself up to her full height.

“I came out to help you,” she said, and, at the unaccustomed note in her voice, Santos glanced at her quickly. “But I did not dream that you would even think of holding me to my promise, now.” She had no longer any dread of the man who had outraged all her ideals, and who clung to the canons of a West which she knew well enough had passed with advancing Civilization. “I thought of you as remorseful, full of sorrow for the suffering you had caused me. I came to tell you that I forgave you; that I believed in you——”

He was watching her in astonishment. Now he attempted to interrupt, but, at a motion of her

hand, he paused. Instinctively he felt the woman's ascendancy over him.

"I came to tell you that, though no one else trusted you, I did. I thought I could make you believe in yourself again—that you could always remember me, not as the woman you had loved, but as the one who had believed in you when the world saw you only as a criminal. I thought I could remember you as a friend, who was striving to atone for a terrible sin. I thought you could help me by proving that I could believe in you." He felt that her eyes were upon him scorching him with their scorn, freezing him with their coldness. Her even voice broke. "But—I was all wrong."

For a moment he caught a fleeting glimpse of himself as she had imagined him. A little more humility and he might have won her! His old jealousy mastered him. She was his. She was the reward, as he had said she was the cause, of all he had suffered since his flight from Santa Fé—the reward for false friends—for sneaking spies—for thwarted ambitions—for his abandoned home—for hunger and thirst and pain. "You love him—the Americano," he said bitterly. "But in the Wilderness you shall forget——"

"Oh!" she cried again, "the Wilderness does not want us—you and me! Nothing, nobody, wants us, if Force and Death are the only laws we know."

He looked at her, as if she spoke incoherently

in language he did not understand. A great weariness swept over him, making his knees tremble. A Santos longing in his heart for peace? Truly, the last week's sufferings had unmanned him! Evelyn had turned away? Evelyn was walking back along the trail, and he was looking after her, dazed and surprised? Her words had touched him, then, in spite of himself? He groped blindly after a Civilization in which he had no part—that until now he had scorned. And his “Evelina” was leaving him? She was more than ever beautiful, more than ever desirable. He started wildly after her.

Evelyn quickened her footsteps. Another moment and she had turned the curve around the boulder. She was in full view of the camp—in, full view of the Civilization of the East—the Civilization which had been his Judge and Jury and which had condemned him to the Wilderness of the Outlaw. A cry escaped him. He groped with his hand desperately to seize her. She was gone!

Santos sprang back, crouching behind the boulder. For a second he felt a wild instinct to—— But his hand dropped again. He crouched like a panther, looking with hungry, longing eyes at the retreating figure. The road curved on itself, and he caught a view of Evelyn's face—calm, set, and resolute. But the girl did not look back. Her eyes were fixed upon the world from which she had come and from which he had shut himself out.

Below, in front of the tents, several men ap-

peared to be talking and gesticulating excitedly. A third automobile stood near. With a curse, Santos drew hastily back.

Evelyn, her head still held high, the strange calm yet possessing her, advanced along the trail. She, too, saw the stranger automobile and distinguished the figures of her father and Mr. Eastcott. Other men were standing with them.

As she drew near, one of the men jumped into the newly arrived car. Words floated to her on the breeze. "You've not seen a sign of him, you say? Then come on, fellows!" A second man leaped in beside the first. The third appeared to linger, speaking with Eastcott. She looked at this third man intently. There was a strange familiarity in the khaki suit, cap, and leggings.

One of the men in the car spoke again: "We'd best be off on the search. Likely enough he's taken a side trail." But Evelyn was still gazing at the khaki-clothed figure. Now she was close enough to distinguish his features.

McNulty was talking to her father and Mr. Eastcott!

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Colonel Deering reached out his hand to her. No one, in the excitement of the new arrivals, had apparently observed her absence.

"These men are officers, dear. They came out from San Diego, after that—Santos. They say the wretch is in the neighborhood."

Evelyn shuddered. They would find him up

there, on the trail. Impulsively, she leaned forward and placed her hand on the bulb of the car nearest to her.

“And here’s McNulty!” she gasped, trying to smile.

She pressed the bulb. “One—two—three!” Santos had asked her to do something for him. She had given him a signal—a warning he would understand.

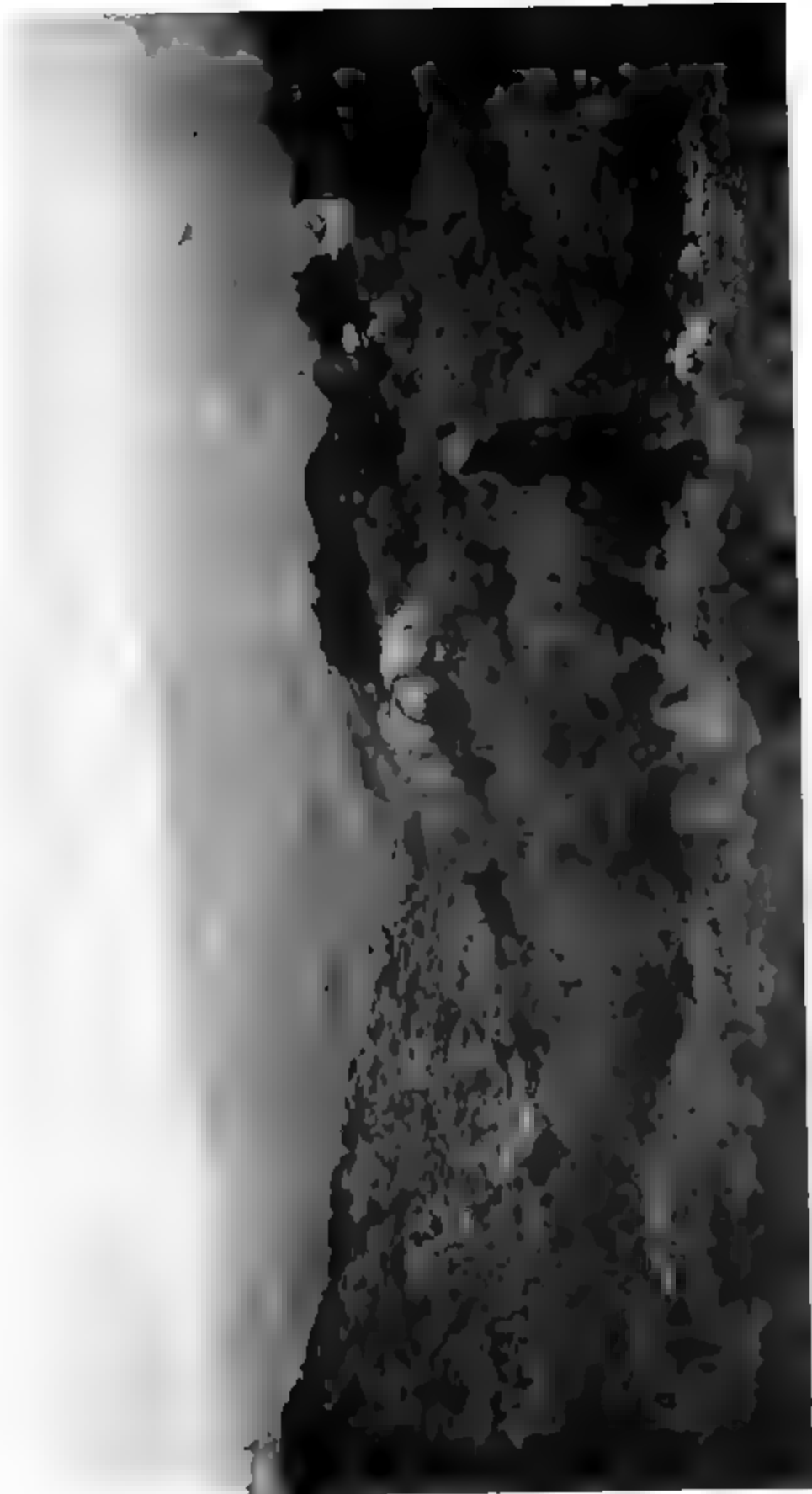
“Good!” exclaimed one of the men. “The lady herself says it’s time we were off. So long, McNulty!”

Colonel Deering put his foot on the running-board. “I’ll go along with you,” he said hotly. “I’d give twenty years of my life to have a hand in rounding up that man you’re after.”

But, as he jumped into the car, Evelyn’s strength abruptly left her. She was suddenly a helpless woman again. The sunny slopes whirled before her. The afternoon grew gray. Faint and sick, she reached for support, and, finding none, she slipped to the ground.

“Oh, Father!” she moaned.

The world grew darker and darker.



"Evelyn was walking back along the trail."



CHAPTER XXXI

“ WELL, McNulty! ” Eastcott spoke peremptorily, as he and Colonel Deering emerged from the ladies’ tent, where they had left Evelyn, faintly smiling and apologetic, to the tender ministrations of Mrs. Eastcott. “ Well, McNulty, where the Devil have you been all this time? ”

The whilom chauffeur’s head was buried beneath the raised bonnet of the Eastcott car. It did not appear to be immediately concerned with its employer’s interrogation. It finished its leisurely inspection, appearing at length with a nonchalant grin. “ Look’s pretty ship-shape, sir, on the whole. Guess I’ll ease up that steering-wheel a bit to-morrow.” McNulty transferred his professional attention from the car to his “ proxy,” who stood by, in jealous gloom.

Eastcott was about to repeat his question, this time with some asperity, when Winthrop appeared abruptly at the entrance of one of the tents. He was enveloped in a long ulster.

“ You? You? Here? ” he exclaimed incredulously. There was a challenge in his tone. He passed his hand over his eyes, like a man suddenly roused from sleep.

“ How do, Mr. Hammond? ” said McNulty cheerfully. Then, his eye catching sight of the sling under the ulster, he stared, open-mouthed,

at the invalid. "What's that, sir? What's happened?" he asked anxiously.

Eastcott's voice brought him up sharply. "Never mind your questions, McNulty. We'll have our innings first."

The chauffeur's shoulders straightened. "Beg your pardon, Boss. It feels so good to be back at my job that I don't know whether I'm on my head or my feet. But, of course, sir, I've got to explain."

Eastcott held back the flap of the tent. "We'll have that story in here, Colonel Deering, I think. Now!" He turned to McNulty, as Winthrop seated himself again on his couch.

McNulty looked around at his audience, awkwardly. For the first time he noticed the coldness of the three faces. He felt suddenly like a prisoner at the bar. His self-confidence gravitated into his boots. He did not know how to begin.

"They had me for fair in Santa Fé, the treacherous devils!" he blurted out. "Then that poor chap that was murdered—Mr. Villara—he come to Lomez and says: 'Let the American gentleman's chuffer go! Don't you know Santos is down an' out, and you've got nothin' to gain or lose? I'm the show now.' An' he was, poor feller. You got the letter O.K.?"

"Yes!" said Eastcott grimly. Winthrop made no remark, but his feverish eyes never left the chauffeur's.

"Well," says I to the Mexicans, 'you send

word to the Boss, or I'll have the President of the United States on your track when I get out of this. Mr. Eastcott 'll have you pinched yet for stealing his automobile from Raton——' ”

“ Stealing his automobile? ” exclaimed the Colonel.

“ When you was sick, sir! ” hastily explained McNulty, as loquacious now as of old he had been taciturn and non-committal.

“ I? Sick? ”

“ The day the Mexicans abducted Miss Deering. ”

“ *Abducted Miss Deering?* ” echoed the Colonel apoplectically.

“ Why, yes,—yes, sir, ” stammered McNulty, suddenly recollecting from Eastcott's signals that Evelyn's adventure was a secret from her father. “ But it wasn't anything to scare you, sir! It wasn't the Mexicans wanted her. It was Santos they got her for. ”

“ *Got her for Santos!* ” The Colonel's ruddy face went as white as a sheet.

“ For Santos? ” echoed Eastcott hoarsely.

Winthrop was leaning forward, speechless at the sudden revelation. Then this was the plot which his mind had vainly striven for weeks to unravel!

The Colonel, ashy pale, buttoned up his coat hurriedly. He looked from one man to another desperately. “ I'll follow those fellows along the trail with my car. Instinct will lead me to that devil's lair. ”

“ Now, now, Colonel! ” Eastcott laid a restraining hand upon his arm. “ For Evelyn’s sake, be calm, be calm! It’s all right. You have my word. He didn’t get her, and she made us promise not to alarm you. None of us, not even she, had the least idea that Santos had anything to do with the affair.”

“ Gee whiz! ” said McNulty, flushed with embarrassment to the roots of his hair for the blunder he had made. He coughed. “ Ahem! Mrs. Eastcott well, I hope, sir? ”

“ How did the fiend get her? How did she escape his clutches? How—— Why, how the devil did all this happen and I——” The Colonel paused for breath.

Eastcott explained hastily.

“ Was Lomez the Mexican you were talking to at Santa Fé, near the Curiosity Shop? ” asked Winthrop sternly. “ And why did you send that fake telegram from Binghamton to Miss Deering? ”

McNulty flushed a more awkward red. “ So you’ve got hold of that, sir! I—— Well, sir, it’s a long yarn! It’ll cost me the job, an’ I’d have liked to have seen the thing through to Los Angeles, now I’ve picked you up again. But I’ll make a clean breast of the whole dirty business.”

The three men leaned toward him eagerly. Colonel Deering set his teeth.

“ You see, Boss, I was huntin’ a job in Chicago when I met Mr. Santos. I’d a lot of racin’ experience an’ a record or two on the track. He knew

that, for a year ago I was in New Mexico on his ranch for a week or two monkeyin' with a car he'd bought for the minin' camps. Well, Santos, he says he was mighty glad to see me again, an', as I was out of a job, did I want one? 'You bet!' says I. Well, says he, there's a man in New York that's goin' across to California. Did I want the place? 'Sure,' says I. He says he could fix it. A friend of his was sendin' the car, and wanted a crackerjack man with Western experience. 'That's me,' says I, though I don't know how he came to hear about you, sir, in the first place."

"We told him," groaned the Colonel, "that a friend of my daughter's was coming across the country in a motor car."

"Well—Santos takes me round to the outfit that furnished the car, an' he sees me off from the depot, and tells me I could do him one or two little turns, and of course I says, 'All right.' He nods and waves his hands and swears he'd make good at the finish, an' I thought things were going fine.

"Well, we starts from New York on the first leg of the trip. First thing I know, one day somebody in the car says we was goin' to Colonel Deering's ranch in New Mexico. 'Jumpin' Jupiter,' says I inside, 'I knows the place. An' I knows the folks. There's somethin' doin', you bet!' Once I'd seen the young lady ridin' with Mr. Santos. I knew he was sweet on her, an' I thought as how he'd got the cheek to go putting in his spoke there when it was common report that he

didn't care for the Americanos and wished the whole blame lot were fired out of Greaser-Land.

"Then I begins puttin' two and two together, and, as I was sittin' next to Mr. Hammond in the tonneau, he drops something out of his pocket, which I picks up. What should it be but a picture of Miss Deering!

"I takes a look at it. There was no mistakin' what you was carryin' that for, Mr. Hammond. I've had a bit of experience myself in the picture-carryin' line. So I holds it out very gingerly, begs your pardon, and asks if you hadn't dropped the bit of paper—quite indifferent like—and, Lord, you should have seen him!" He turned to the others. "I guess he didn't know whether to have a scrap with me there and then or not. Anyway, he pockets it, like a flash, looking all ways at once. So I lays low, with my ears pricked, just to see the fun through. Then I gets a queer kind of a letter from Mr. Santos at Binghamton, an' it inclosed a telegram, all written out to Miss Deering, that I was to get off in short order. It was signed with Mr. Hammond's name, and, just for the fun of the thing—well, I sent it. That's all there is to it. But I could have kicked myself when I found out the rumpus it made. When we got to Chicago and sees the man who made me send off that big Lie, I—well, I couldn't hold on to the secret any longer. 'There's the man!' says I, to Mr. Hammond.

"Well, seeing Santos still there was surprise

enough, but when I found that the Deerings had left Chicago just because of that telegram, and saw how Mr. Hammond cut up about it, there wasn't a man in that hotel hotter under the collar than me. I said I'd cut loose from the dirty business right there. It made me tired to think how I'd been fooled. So I makes tracks for Santos, and, sure enough, I finds him playin' the dude on the street. I gives him a wink, and he beckons me into a hotel-bar, and we talks. Well, sir, there's no use repeatin' here, like a stenographer, word for word. Some of it might be among the news that ain't fit to print. Anyway, I tells him, polite and cool enough, that I'd done the trick for him once too often. What was more, that, if his motives was to keep the Deerings and the Eastcottses off each other's visiting lists, it was no concern of mine; but he'd have to get another cat's-paw. He didn't seem to like that, and said there wasn't no harm in sending the telegram. The whole thing was as innocent as a new-born babe, and I'd simply done him a good turn. Then he swore by all the saints that he had a good job waitin' for me in New Mexico, with lots of chances to make a fortune. But I ups and tells him I liked to see things done on the square. Then he asks me what kind of a man was Mr. Hammond. Says I, he was a fine feller, and a mighty favorite with the ladies, and a coming candidate for the Presidency. I just laid myself out for fair to tell him that there might have been a wedding in Chicago but for his interferin' telegram. Mr.

Santos understood that I had wiped my hands clean of him, and that I was on the side of the favorite—an' he forgot to pay for the drinks.

“ But the fun was started. Mr. Santos was as mad as a hatter, an' the first thing he does is to go and look up Mr. Hammond. I comes to the hotel just's they parted, and Santos sees me and snaps his fingers in my face. Then Mr. Hammond runs out after me and wants to know what I've had to do with Santos. Of course, I keeps my own counsel, but I tells him not to trust the feller; he ain't an angel. I guess Mr. Hammond was mad at Santos and me and everybody else; an' I couldn't say nothin' about the telegram or I'd have been queered as well as Santos. Well, we reached Kansas City, an' things looked interestin', I can tell you, from the chuffer's standpoint. Some days I'd wake up and say, 'Now young Hammond's going to get an innings to-day.' And hanged if it wasn't the other fellow who come in for all the young lady's strawberries and smiles. Then it would go the other way, an' I'd only got to look at their faces to see what the happenings had been. Talk about yellow journalism—why, it was printed all over their faces—big, scary headlines and all.

“ Thinks I, Mr. Santos is puttin' in a lot of time tryin' to forget me, but it'll be all to the good. Give me a chance to find out more about his game—if any. He'd had more than a week to play his trump cards, and sure enough, when

we got to Raton, there was his trademark on the camping outfit—all slashed about, as you know. Says I, ‘That’s Santos, tryin’ to spoil the trip so the young lady don’t go along.’ But I couldn’t be sure, and I wasn’t ready for his next move by a long shot. First thing I knows I gets up in the mornin’ an’ my car was gone, an’ Miss Deering a-ridin’ away in the tonneau with them Greasers. ‘Señor Santos,’ says I, grim-like, but I dasn’t tell Mr. Hammond, for I wasn’t sure, and—— Well, we got the car again safe an’ sound, as you know. An’ the young lady, too.

“The first thing I knows, in Santa Fé one day, I sees one of the Greasers. Yes, siree. The very same,—the feller at the wheel when they left Raton! He had a beard an’ I remember he was the talker of the two. The other fellow had a big scar down his face. I leaves my car an’ slips into a convenient doorway. I couldn’t believe my senses that the thing was going to be so easy. However, I sees that I must get acquainted if I wanted to find out the bed-rock facts. Well, it wasn’t a minute before I had my chance. The feller comes down the street, an’ I comes out from under cover an’ sees by his smiles that he’s feelin’ pretty good. An’ I goes up to him and says, ‘How do!’

“Lord, you should have seen him jump! A kind o’ jump a conger-eel would make if you trod on its tail. When he comes back to earth again, he’d a face as cool as a polar bear’s and he says, says he, ‘Have a drink.’ I noticed he’d got more com-

mald of the American tongue in them few words than when I met him at Raton. He was dressed up to kill, and then I sees that he was no chuffer by profession. He was a bit nearer the dude. I put my nerve on cold storage, and I says, admiring: 'I never laughed so much in my life as when you ran off with the car and the girl. It was the slickest thing of a "joy-ride" on record.' At that he kinder jumped again, as if he didn't quite get the lay o' me, but I kept up the bluff hard.

" 'I never felt so sore in my life as when we upset your little game. I've been wondering ever since how you managed to get out of that hole and what became of your pard.'

" 'He's all right,' said the Greaser, warming up to me a bit.

" 'What d'ye think of that for luck?' says I. 'You put up a game run for us, I tell you. The girl says you gave her the nicest treatment, and she was kinder sorry when her friends spoiled the trip, for she was very fond of that Señor Santos.' Beg your pardon, Mr. Hammond and Colonel, for the lie.

" 'Señor Santos?' says he, pricking his ears and lookin' as if he'd like to knife me. 'How do you know that?'

" 'What?' says I. 'That you was taking the young lady under orders to Señor Santos? It wasn't you who was going to marry her, anyway, was it? Don't I know how crazy he is to get her, and can't?'

" 'What's your game, anyway?' he asks.

“ ‘ Nothing,’ I says, ‘—only to help you a bit, and tell you how to make a better job of it next time. I’m mighty glad to have met you. My name’s O’Brien—what’s yours? Can’t we get together? ’

“ ‘ Certainly,’ he says eagerly. But I sees him takin’ my measure, to know if he could trust me.

“ Well, I told him I was sick of my job, and finally wheedled out from him that his name was ‘ Lomez.’ He seemed to take to me all of a sudden, and asks me again to have a drink in the back room, where we could be undisturbed. ‘ Tonight,’ says I, ‘ I’ll meet you, pard, at eight, sharp! ’ So I meets him that night, and we have a drink, an’ he says, ‘ What d’ye know? ’ Then I tells him as how the young lady was fair gone on the Señor and was secretly pining for him, only her father was opposed to her having anything to do with a Mexican and wanted to force her into a marriage with an American chap she didn’t care for,—beg yer pardon again, Mr. Hammond and Colonel,—and it was a howling shame to see such an injustice. After that he unlimbered. If we could only get the girl, there was big money in it. That was about all there was to it, for next thing there was a whole skyful of stars floating ’round me, and I woke up in a room with a locked door and a small barred window, and a head like a pumpkin, and feeling as sick as a dog, and wondering what end of an earthquake

had struck me. Guess Mr. Lomez wasn't such a lemon to squeeze as I'd thought!

"I don't exactly know how long I'd been there on the durndest hard-wooden settle, covered with a dirty Navajo blanket, when in comes Lomez. I was as mad as a bull when I saw him, but I guess I was pretty weak, too, and so I just lies there and blinks and stares at him. Lomez wasn't losing any time on politeness, but he sails right in and tells me that he felt pretty sore about the whole thing. He'd done his best to give me a good time after the fellow cracked me on the head and had put me out of harm's way to sober up. That was the first I knew about it, that I'd been drunk on that vinegar stuff he'd given me, and I made no bones about it, but said that he'd given me some knockout drops. At which he laughs, kinder sheep-like. Whereupon it comes over me that the Boss would be wonderin' where I was, only I couldn't let on about that to the grinning Greaser, as I'd told him I was looking for a job. I just said I must get out of it, as I'd a little date with someone, and he said he might as well tell me my friends had left Santa Fé. You could have knocked me down with a spark-plug. I'd been there nigh on a week. Then, says I, 'You send the Boss word I'm a-comin'. An' Lomez laughs again, an' says, 'All right, Mr. McNulty.'

"Now that was another staggerer. How, in the name of thunder, had he got hold of my right name? But I was to find that all out afterwards,

and that I'd been a pretty bad case after the crack on the head. They'd had a Greaser doctor to see me, and I'd been more like a lunatic than a sane man, and everybody was in a blue funk wonderin' whether there wouldn't have to be a secret burial.

"Lomez was a kinder weak-livered chap, but I made out he sent the letter, for it wasn't long before a gent named Villara turned up. He was the liveliest sort of a Greaser I ever saw—a regular bundle of slickness. He was a good fellow, but he moved his arms and head to land his points, and, when he had a corker to drive home, he'd bring his legs into play, also, and I just grew dizzy watching him and trying to count how many there was of him in the room.

"I warmed up to him right away. He seemed 'white.' Said he'd just come from the Deering ranch and had talked with the Transcontinental folks. That won me on the spot. Said you was all anxious about me and puttin' the police on the job, to know what had happened to me. He'd seen Lomez's letter an' he'd promised to find me. Of course, I wondered how he should have known all about me, but Lomez up and says he'd make a clean breast of things. Then he give me a long rigmarole fairy tale, which set my head spinning again, for it was burning like a house afire, and I was too weak to get up and as hungry as a sheep-herder. As near as I can figure it, there was some sort of secret society of which Mr. Santos was the whole thing, and Lomez his tool. Then

Santos was pitched out, and Villara got his job. Then Lomez went over to Villara, secrets and all. Thinks I, 'You're not worth a tinker's cuss for character, but you'll suit me to a T for finding all that I want to know about Santos.' Lomez tells everything he knows about the kidnapping--said the idea was to get Miss Deering to a little house at Las Vegas, where a priest and everything was ready for a first-class private wedding. The plot fizzled out, and Santos got so mad about it that he said he'd 'fix' Lomez. Then Lomez sees his chance to make good by gettin' hold o' me.

"I took in as much of it as my head would hold, and then Mr. Villara said I was a free man as soon as I was well enough, an' I could catch you up somewhere in Arizona. So Mr. Villara went away, leaving some money with me. I guess it was about the second day after that Lomez came runnin' in, as white as a sheet, with the news that his new boss, Villara, had been killed. There had been a meeting of the secret society, and Mr. Santos unexpectedly come in, and there'd been a row. Before anyone could stop him, Santos had shot Villara dead. Then there was more row, an' Santos escaped into Arizona, with some half-breed Indians from his ranch along for protection. The police didn't know who killed Villara, but, after they'd fussed around for a couple of days, Lomez got scared and owned up he'd seen Santos do it.

"By this time, we all knew the sheriffs every-

where were hot on Santos' trail. There was a big reward out for him. It made my mouth water, but it did seem that I never would get well. Then one day in came a kind of private 'tec,' an' he said Mr. Hammond had put him on the job of lookin' for me. 'Now,' says I, 'that's what I call friendly. I always did like Mr. Hammond.' I braced right up an' says, 'I'll go to my folks tomorrow.' He says, 'You can catch them at Imperial or San Diego.' But I figured San Diego, to make sure I wouldn't miss you, and there I've been. While I was waitin', I sees in the noospaper that Santos was in these parts, an' the police was goin' to make a little raid for him on their own account. Well, the upshot of it was I makes myself known and goes along with the search-car. Thinks I, 'It'll be fun, one way or the other. I'll meet Santos an' get some of that reward, or I'll meet my Boss. I'm suited either way.' And that's about all there is to it."

McNulty turned to Eastcott, with a look of mingled self-confidence and hesitation.

"An' now, sir, I guess I'll go back to my job, if you'll take me."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE energetic “*gringo*” has long since invaded the once sleepy, old, adobe pueblo of Los Angeles, and the city of the Queen of the Angels has become a busy center of commerce and stirring activity. In spite of the exquisite charm of its enveloping mountain scenery, it retains little semblance to that earthly paradise which the monkish founders of old dedicated to *Nuestra Señora, La Reina de los Angeles*. The *Padres* have gone; the Blessed Virgin no longer, it may be, vouchsafes any manifestation of her guardianship. But thanks, perhaps, to their gentle ministrations, the blight of modernity which has fallen on the City has, at least, spared the lovely suburbs of Los Angeles. Under dream skies, which poet and painter may worship, roses riot in the sunshine. The air is as sweet and the atmosphere as balmy as when the Spanish missionaries sang their “*Aves*” and tolled the “*Angelus*” to listening Indian ears. In this “*Land of the Sunny Afternoon*,” at the gate of “*Ramona’s*” country, soil and stream, hill and homestead smile.

It was to his favorite suburb of Los Angeles that Colonel Deering had cheerfully and safely conducted Mrs. Eastcott and Winthrop, by train

from San Diego. The invalid had borne the journey well—a condescension on his part not surprising in view of the forceful admonitions of the Colonel, the moral suasion of an anxious aunt, and the regard of a pair of sympathetic, hazel eyes. The Colonel, for some esoteric reasons best known to himself, had of late assumed a kind of proprietary right in Winthrop, and now loudly proclaimed that the young man was to be fit and well within the next ten days, or he would “demand the reason why.”

As one of the essential conditions for this desired end, there had been selected the sunniest suite in a palm-environed hotel of Pasadena, set in a picturesque frame of soft skies and distant, forested mountains. In the daytime, the invalid luxuriously reclined in a spacious, open-air parlor, through whose latticed blinds the warm sun of a Californian winter streamed from noon till evening. All his surroundings served to foster the illusion that summer was still at hand, or, rather, that winter had never as yet managed to reach these heavenly shores from across the lofty peaks of the snow-clad Sierras. The Colonel was continually popping in and out of the sun-parlor, clad in white “ducks” and gray “derby” and smoking innumerable cigars with a cheery indifference to physical consequences. Orchids and summer flowers were massed on the tables and in numerous vases, artistically displayed for the greatest effect, in every corner of the room and the perfume-swept piazza. Mrs. Eastcott and

Evelyn, who had found several trunks impatiently awaiting their advent, had forced these heavily-laden ministers to their comfort to obediently disgorge their diaphanous wardrobes and the mummy-like wrappings of the automobile days had given place, in the one case, to the styles of Paris as displayed at Trouville and Ascot, and, in the other, to clinging frocks of white that Winthrop thought marvelously becoming.

The invalid was pleasantly conscious of a sense of luxurious ease as, late on the afternoon of the day on which his uncle and McNulty were to reach Los Angeles, he lay on his couch chatting idly with his feminine "callers." Mrs. Eastcott, in hat and cloak, as if ready for a journey, sat by his side. One vivacious eye regarded the clock at frequent intervals. Evelyn, somewhat withdrawn, sat at the further end of the room, bending over a strip of Indian bead-work, which her deft fingers were fashioning into something strangely resembling a tobacco-pouch.

"Well, the tour's all but over," said Mrs. Eastcott, with a little sigh, "and, on the whole, I'm more sorry than glad—though, when I left New York, I must confess I never expected to see the coast, alive."

"And not a single Apache dangles your scalp by his side! And the coyotes have done nothing worse than avoid you!" smiled Winthrop.

Evelyn held up the gay bit of bead-work, examining it critically.

"Didn't I tell you and John that I was no

‘Norah,’ to be left at home in her ‘Dolls’ House’?” said Mrs. Eastcott triumphantly.

“And now you can have the ‘Dolls’ House,’ on the Avenue, carpeted with the skins of the mountain-lions you shot, Aunt. Hooray!” One hand patted the couch with flattering applause.

Mrs. Eastcott waved her lorgnette significantly at her nephew. “Now, young man, none of your sarcasm! You remember that, in the first place, I said I was needed to take care of you, if—if a bear or an Indian took a bite out of you. What would you have done if I hadn’t been along, I’d like to know?” She glanced from the wounded arm to Evelyn.

Whatever might have been Winthrop’s answer to this problematic situation, it was prevented by the abrupt opening of the door. Colonel Deering burst into the room, in evident excitement.

“Well, I have a piece of news!” he blurted out. “I’ve just heard——” Then, catching sight of Evelyn, he paused in the middle of his sentence. “I—er—— You know Santos escaped over the frontier into Mexico, as we read in the paper a couple of days ago?”

“Yes!” said Mrs. Eastcott interestedly. Evelyn looked up.

“Well, I’ve just met a man who has come from Santa Fé. He says the police have unearthed a secret society there—a regular sedition camp, that was plotting against the United States government. And Santos was the leader of the whole thing.”

There was a breathless silence. Then Mrs. Eastcott exclaimed excitedly, "And that was the society he and poor Mr. Villara were quarreling about that night at dinner!"

"Precisely!" agreed the Colonel. "The police say there was a well-conceived and partly-executed plan on foot for the separation of the old-time territories of Mexico from the American Union. Santos had already got his military schools well under way. The organization, with Santos as leader, used to meet in the Apache Canyon. That man Lomez, from whom your husband had the letter, was its secretary." He turned to Winthrop. "Of course, that's the meeting you interrupted in the canyon. It's as clear as day, now. Thank the Lord, the police have got the whole thing wiped out, 'schools' and 'reforms' and all!"

Evelyn caught her breath. Santos a revolutionist! His great ambition and the "dreams" which had stirred her to enthusiasm and admiration all directed toward Sedition!

There was an awkward pause.

Mrs. Eastcott was the first to recover herself. "Colonel," she said, without glancing at Evelyn, "will you look out of the window, please? Is the 'taxi' waiting? I must get into the city in plenty of time to meet John, you know."

The Colonel peered through the latticed blinds.

"It's just drawing up, I believe. But, anyway, Eastcott won't take his triumph without his ablest general."

Mrs. Eastcott stood in front of the mirror, giving the final touch to her veil. Suddenly her hands dropped limply to her side.

“Win,” she gasped, “who shot you?”

Before Winthrop, taken aback by surprise, could answer, Mrs. Eastcott went on:

“Did—did Santos, and not the Indians, shoot you?” Her words ended in a little shriek.

Winthrop slowly reddened from his forehead to his chin.

“Great Scott!” exclaimed Colonel Deering, sinking heavily into a chair. The bead-work had dropped from Evelyn’s hand. She sat frozen to a statue-like coldness.

“Did he?” cried Mrs. Eastcott.

The flush deepened on Winthrop’s face. “I—you know——” he began guiltily.

“He did!” Mrs. Eastcott’s voice trembled now with excitement and horror. “John said the keeper saw a white man with the Indians.”

There was a sound of a quick, little sob—of a flutter of skirts—of a rush across the room. Evelyn dropped on her knees beside the couch.

“Oh—oh!” she sobbed. “Winthrop! Winthrop!”

Instantly there was another flutter of skirts and another rush—this time in the direction of the hallway. In her flight, Mrs. Eastcott grasped the bewildered Colonel by the arm and dragged him with her from the room. Outside the closed door they faced one another—the lady, laughing and tearful; the other, too confused and sur-

prised to do more than pant in rapid, labored breaths.

“ Oh, please, please, Colonel, do not breathe so hard! ” pleaded Mrs. Eastcott, with a rainbow smile. “ You will frighten them away from each other. They will think someone is coming. And this—this is the moment of their lives! ”

“ This? ” said the Colonel, making a desperate effort to control his panting. “ Why—why—because Santos shot him, you mean? ”

“ Yes! Come with me, please, to the ‘ taxi.’ They love each other. Oh, Colonel, they are telling each other so now! How marvelous—how thrilling—how beautiful it is! ”

The Colonel led her to the elevator. As they stepped in, he asked, in a dazed voice: “ But how did you know that Santos——”

“ Oh, I don’t know! I mean I don’t know how I knew! Something told me. Women are made that way! ”

The Colonel regarded her admiringly. “ You’re a wonderful woman—a wonderful woman! I always said so.” And he shook his fellow conspirator’s hands with enthusiasm. “ A wonderful woman! ” he repeated, so fervently that the elevator boy told the clerk later that the “ old party from New Mexico was daffy on the *auto-mo-bile* lady from New York.”

They lingered a moment in the entrance lounge, as if loath to part.

“ If I had known what Señor Santos was up to,” remarked Mrs. Eastcott vivaciously, “ I

should have been more afraid of him than of bears and Indians. It's a wonder the revolutionists didn't attack us in the Apache Canyon and turn us into Mexicans on the spot."

The Colonel laughed, but there was less heartiness in his voice.

With a sudden transition from Santos to the lovers upstairs, Mrs. Eastcott exclaimed triumphantly: "Well, Colonel, I must go. Our partnership is successfully concluded." She held out her hand.

The Colonel took it. There was a wistfulness in his eyes.

"Yes," he said. "Successfully concluded! I told you I could feel that she was in love with somebody."

Mrs. Eastcott smiled sympathetically. "I understand. You're a father. You're glad, and you're sorry, too. *Au revoir!*"

Inside the sun-parlor, neither Colonel Deering's heavy panting nor anything else had disturbed the lovers. Evelyn knelt on the floor. The uninjured arm drew her close. She buried her face on Winthrop's shoulder.

Winthrop did not speak. He kissed her slowly, almost solemnly.

Through the latticed blinds the sky was already faintly pink with the promise of a glowing sunset. He thought of the afternoon when so long ago in New York, the sunset had beckoned him. He remembered that then he had fancied the fig-

ure of a woman dimly outlined by the roseate clouds. And now—she was here beside him. His clasp tightened.

A smothered voice broke the hush.

“ Oh, Winthrop! ” sobbed Evelyn. “ I was all wrong—wrong about Santos, wrong about you. I do love you. I loved you even at Pecos.”

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Ten o'clock! The soft footfall of a servant, who made ready the inner room for the night! Then silence! Winthrop was alone.

Presently the sound of a motor-horn broke the stillness. He heard his uncle's—McNulty's—voices; the laughter of Mrs. Eastcott and Evelyn; the Colonel's cheery greeting.

Winthrop smiled. Drowsily he drew from beneath his pillow a photograph—his talisman—the same picture which McNulty had returned to him in the automobile. He carried it slowly to his lips. The Transcontinental journey was ended; the glorious journey of Life—with Evelyn—was begun.

Gradually the voices outside died away. Footsteps moved along the corridor, past his door. Then once more there was silence!

Winthrop Hammond slept.

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